

A BABE IN BOHEMIA

BY FRANK DANBY
AUTHOR OF "DR PHILLIPS"

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BABE IN BOHEMIA

BY

FRANK DANBY

AUTHOR OF 'DR. PHILLIPS : A MAIDA VALE IDYL'

' Vice is a monster of so frightful mien
As to be hated needs but to be seen ;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace '
POPE

LONDON


SPENCER BLACKETT

[Successor to J. & R. Maxwell]

MILTON HOUSE, 35, ST. BRIDE STREET, LUDGATE CIRCUS, E.C.

1889

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A BABE IN BOHEMIA.



CHAPTER I.

BOHEMIA is a vast city—a city growing daily more extensive as the repute of its charms attracts one by one the Prince and the poet, the Archbishop and the artist. In such a city there are Palaces and pig-sties, there is an Aristocracy and a democracy, there are the Pharisees and the publicans.

No. 200, Southampton Row, W.C., the house where the Babe first saw the light, the house in which her twin brother Marius took his last glance at it—a dim and uncertain glance enough—is not a segment of aristocratic Bohemia. It is a low house leading straight on to the street; its windows are dulled with the smoke from Tottenham Court Road, and dreary with mists from Russell Square. The railings are begrimed, the stone area green and worn with neglect and decay. The

bell hangs loosely in its socket, and the knocker is wrenched off its bidding-place. But for all its dirt, neglect, decay, No. 200, Southampton Row is in the City—the gay, rollicking, careless City of Bohemia.

Respectability frowns at it from over the way, whitens its steps perennially, brightens its bell-handles, and hangs up its white window-curtains. Respectability round the corner puts its nose in the air, virtuously using its latch-key as it returns from the City, and thanks God that ‘we are not as they.’ Respectability next door is woke up out of its first sleep by the midnight cabs and the midnight music, the racket and the din of wine-parties and supper-parties, the sound of the piano, and the noise of brawling voices chaffing phlegmatic policemen as the revellers depart in the early morning, rolling homeward singing noisily as the pale moon fades in the glow of dawn.

This was the home Lucilla was brought up in; such a home as a man like Roland Lewesham can make for his children. Roland Lewesham, proprietor of *Footlights*, and putative editor of that weekly journal, was a largely-built man, about forty years of age. He was above the middle height, and his figure was aldermanic. His features

were coarse, his eyes bloodshot, his nose made one suspicious. He wore glasses, and had a habit of pushing them back and fidgeting with them constantly. His big head looked like 'brain'; but he had a weak mouth and chin, sweet in the smiling, that contradicted the promise of the brow. He had founded a new school of journalism, and everyone in London knows of Roland Lewesham.

Yet Rolly—he was the sort of man that even strangers called Rolly—was country bred and country born. Honourable and cleanly living people were Rolly's parents; the man tilled the ground, the woman tended her cows and her chickens. Bad agricultural years respected their thrift, and passed them by harmless; the rain softened their seed, the sun ripened their corn, their granaries were well filled, and their fruit-trees bowed under the weight of the fruit. Seventeen years they toiled together with hearts a little empty save of each other, hardening perhaps in the weathers, but sweet and sound. Thus when it seemed too late for hope, their many prayers were answered, and Rolly was born.

A strange sapling to grow from such a tree!
A country lad; the idol of his old parents; quick

at his lessons, eager in play ; in short, rosy-cheeked and active, fair, wholesome and abundantly English.

And so he might have been living until now ; undeveloped, primitive, harmless, but for William Ringer, and William Ringer's training-stables that were within a walk of his home. How dull was agriculture, and how slow of result, compared to those rows of boxes with their sleek and shining-coated occupants ! How few the pence, gathered slowly with sweating brow and horny hand, compared to the gold that flowed in easily to the inspired backer of Bellerophon or his stable companion !

The companionship of stable-boys and racing touts had its usual results. There was not much evil in Roland Lewesham, and what there was might have remained for ever dormant ; but there was an eager, excitable, nervous nature, and there had been no training or exercise in self-repression. When he lost more than he could pay—and he was barely nineteen when this inevitable incident occurred—he could not bear to face those parents of his who had trusted and believed in him, and even looked up to him, whose bright-faced youth had seemed God-like to their

toil-worn eyes; so he left them. Rather than see a momentary cloud he fled—let them suffer, let their hearts bleed for him, only that he was not there to see it. This was Rolly all over—perhaps there is something lovable in such weakness; tender-hearted, he could not bear to see the pain of their disappointment, yet by flight he doubled it.

He came to London, nineteen years of age, country bred and born, ignorant but eager. The Metropolis acted upon him and corroded his brightness; his sensitive ears became attuned to the roar of the multitude and lost their relish for sweeter sounds. Bright as a mirror, the foul breath of the City tarnished him, and he no longer reflected the loving faces of his parents, or the merriment of his boy friends. He was possessed with eager desires; the youth that woke in him awoke in a hot and noxious atmosphere, and he absorbed the atmosphere, breathing it back, adding his quota later on to the general murkiness.

There is no need to dwell upon the details of his fall. Those friends he gathers round him now—for Rolly Lewesham has a very real existence in London to-day—would be surprised to hear that it can be considered a fall, from being the village hero and the loved son of his parents,

to being the editor of *Footlights*, and one of the 'dearest old chappies in the world.'

Temptations abound in everyone's life, but some people are warned to withstand them; and some, not bred in the country, can see through tinsel into the grosser body that it covers. Impetuous Rolly saw nothing but pleasure, and he was as eager for pleasures in his youth as he became for excitement in his manhood.

There was no one to help or guide him. The old couple, dreaming away in their gathering years, never dreamed of Rolly as aught but the bright-faced boy they knew and loved, until the awakening was too late.

On the Tom Tiddler's ground where William Jecks had introduced him he scattered the guineas for others to pick up.

He had no guide but youth and recklessness; the old couple in the country were alone again in their age, and went down into the Valley of the Shadow of Death with hearts that ached and eyes that were red with weeping for a prodigal who did not return. London swallowed up Rolly. The 'turf' was only the commencement; other vices followed. He grew in wisdom then, but the knowledge came too late to profit him—it came

when the hopes of his early manhood and the charm of his early manner had left him for ever, and physical suffering drove him, in the decay of his ruined constitution, to fresh excesses, against which his new-born wisdom profited him nothing.

His father died first. The mother lived long enough to see her bright and beautiful boy in his profitless and degraded manhood.

Whence came the two children he brought her one day—the twin babies whom he asked her to take and bring up for his sake, and to let them comfort her in her loneliness and disappointment?

She never asked, and Rolly never told her; the terror and degradation of their birth was not for her to hear; their mother's name was to be forgotten, and to perish for ever off the face of the earth. And so it came about.

They were pretty babes, these children of Rolly's and that 'nameless one.' Marius, epileptic and idiot, the seeds of his malady developed fast, and as it developed, so faded all hopes of influencing Rolly through his children. The hope faded, as all hopes in and about Rolly had a habit of fading.

She kept the children until she died, and Rolly

lived his life apart from her and them. He loved his mother always, this developed Rolly, this hard-drinking, loose-living Roland ; he caressed her always—she at least never heard from his lips any ungentle word—he never lied to her or deceived her, save by holding back that which would grieve her. He had no moral backbone, became in time unable to distinguish between right and wrong, all his finer senses decayed and melted away ; but it must be written he loved his mother.

When she died he fetched the children home. Home to Southampton Row, home to Nettie ; for the mother of the children was forgotten, and genial Rolly did not live alone.

He did not live alone. Such men as Roland Lewesham rarely live alone. But at the time his mother died, and he brought the children home with him, Roland's vagrant fancies had crystallized, and Nettie was the guiding star of his life.

Nettie was—had been—but never mind Nettie's career ; it would fill a volume, and the volume would be interdicted, so the writing would be a waste of time. She took a fancy to Rolly ; she robbed him of all he had left : his ambitions, his remnant of self-respect, his sense of order and

decency. She enjoyed the courtesy title and all the privileges of Mrs. Roland Lewesham.

Rolly spent his parents' money right royally. Nettie, getting on in years, and off in attractions, thought his attention should be turned to increasing instead of decreasing his income. There was something very bright about Nettie's intelligence. And she knew her world—such a world as it was—very well.

Rolly had had as good an education as the local school could afford him ; in whatever he undertook as a boy he had been easily first. Which of his talents to turn to account was his only doubt, when Nettie began to drum into him that he must make money for them both.

‘Shall I go to the Bar?’ he asked her.

‘The bar!’ retorted Nettie; ‘you’d never get any further.’

The misunderstanding was natural, for Rolly had grown to think that of all enjoyable feelings, none was so delightful as the irresponsibility that comes upon the semi-drunk. However, the idea of his studying for a profession at his time of life was pooh-poohed by the lady to whom he looked for guidance. But something he must do.

There are careers in Bohemia very much open

to a young man with a little brains, a little money, and a popular burlesque actress—for such had been Nettie's profession in life—at his command.

Rolly took a theatre—that was the climax of the discussions as to ways and means—and although he did not become a millionaire at the business, still he mismanaged it less than most amateurs.

The children were growing up while Rolly was the proprietor of the 'Leggeries'—as his place of amusement was aptly nicknamed. And Nettie was also growing, not exactly up, but rather down ; she grew stiff, and her voice was not what it had been. Before failure had time to write its indelible letters across the portal of the theatre, Nettie retired, and as it was not in her to see another star arise in her place, Rolly retired with her.

Still, the money he had made was not enough to keep the home going for ever. He had gathered around him a large circle of friends, and he had made no enemies. Rolly never had an enemy in his life ; all his weaknesses were lovable. His friends were sporting and theatrical, but Nettie's wisdom and her desire for good notices had made him also entertain journalists.

Who first started the idea was never quite remembered, but there the idea came, and it sprang full-grown into action. Rolly must have a paper ; there was room for another theatrical paper ; all these smart young friends of his would write for him—that was how to make a fortune. Hoorah ! that's the idea ; Rolly should have a paper.

Footlights sprang into success almost with the first number ; it caught on, and it settled once and for ever the question of Rolly's income.

Rolly's ten years of knocking about left him very little bucolic ignorance. He had ceased to be a living for the bookmakers, and even learnt to add to his income by a timely bet. In truth, the lad, who had almost been brought up in a training-stable, possessed a very pretty knowledge of the noble beast. Fortunately, also, just about the time Rolly left off theatre-managing, and had a little ready money, William Ringer was in pecuniary difficulties. Rolly tided him over them, and the information he received in return helped the paper to a reputation.

Rolly's sporting article—the one thing in the paper he always wrote himself—was well done. When success was assured, and money came in regularly, Rolly bought horses, and put them in

training. He was not very fortunate in his animals, but remained 'in the know' through them ; and, in reality, it was the racing, more than the pleasing details as to the private life of actresses, that gave *Footlights* its place.

Rolly's instructions to his staff were clear.

'None of your sweetness and light,' he said ; 'sweetness and light are off. Excitement, glare, that's what the Johnnies want, and I mean to give it them. Something spicy, something with a flavour in it. Teddie and I will see the sporting is kept up to the mark. You fellows must fill up with all the good things you can get hold of. Mordaunt Rivers will boss that.'

With such instructions, and the able lieutenancy of an old friend of Nettie's, Mr. Mordaunt Rivers, *Footlights* breasted the tide and floated into popularity. Nettie was the key that had unlocked to the mercurial son of the old yeoman all the gates of this curious Bohemia.

Footlights even came to have a certain amount of influence ; and in pursuit of it the house in Southampton Row was daily and nightly thronged with a company difficult to parallel in any other city than London, in any other quarter than Bohemia.

Journalists, clean and dull, brilliant but soiled, striving upwards or sinking downwards; trainers and racing men; young lordlings who patronized the stage, young actresses who patronized them; oyster-shop proprietors, stage-managers, prize-fighters and music-hall singers—anybody and everybody who could make Rolly laugh and pay Nettie compliments, that she craved for the more as she evoked them the less.

They practised a brilliant hospitality—the place was the very paradise of bar-loafers; and so amusing were the scenes that occurred and the incidents which developed, that the ‘paper’ soon became the medium through which an interested and curious world followed their doings.

They invented words and phrases, this circle of the apostles of loose living. They corresponded with each other and the outer world by means of “Replies to Contributors,” couched in their own peculiar vernacular; advertised their favourite restaurants free of charge, and made the fortune of more than one innkeeper who gave credit for dinners and suppers. For the small sum of one penny the British public read about them and their doings every week in a column or so, written in conjunction and headed ‘Nights out!’

Bacchus was their god ; and soon the title of *Footlights* was supplemented by that of the *Guzzler's Gazette*. Rolly became better known as 'Guzzleton,' and all the synonyms of drink were freely lavished on the rest of the staff, who became world-renowned under their nicknames.

What orgies under their roof! The neighbourhood was scandalized, and the quiet nights turned into uproarious day. Rolly had no time to remember anything but the last good story or the next bad song. Nettie was queen of the revels, and it is sufficient to say that her myrmidons were worthy of their queen.

Such was the house Rolly had brought his twin children to, eight years ago now. Eight years the children had lived there, high up under the roof, away from the house and the gaiety, neglected, forgotten, living alone—two of them, a boy and a girl, Marius and Lucilla. Soon there would be only one. There was drink and talk downstairs while Marius lay dying ; but the din was hushed when the news spread that he was dead. Off went the gay young men and the gayer women, shrinking away one by one as death poised its black wings over the house, shedding its gloom in a message they were not ready to hear.

CHAPTER II.

BUT still Marius was not alone in his death-agonies. One there was who had shared with him these long eight years all the horrors of his life—who had lived by him, with him, benumbed by the burden, paralyzed by the weight, but always gentle, always forbearing, trying to hide from him and from herself the dreadful physical shrinking that his infirmities awoke in her.

For there was the fact in all its native hideousness—Marius, the only son of our brilliant Rolly, was a loathsome epileptic idiot.

And for eight years now—ever since her grandmother died, and dying left no one to take up, as she had done, the responsibilities Rolly had been so glad to drop—Lucilla, his twin sister, had lived with Marius alone in these dull upstairs rooms; had looked out of the dirty windows and envied the neat and prim little girls, with their plaits and their governesses, and their air of being hemmed

in by laws and rules and restrictions ; had turned away from the sight, her child's heart sick with the longing for the care, and the love, and the very restrictions which proved that love and care, and in the turning had been met by the shambling figure that pervaded all her tender youth.

Marius's figure, his dim eyes gazing unspeculative, his loose limbs as if badly connected with the parent trunk, his gait uncertain, now bringing him into contact with this or that article of furniture, his heavy feet planted springless on the floor—Marius, poor, slow-speeched, idiot Marius, was her constant and only companion.

If the sound of music and of laughter penetrated to her ears, and awoke in her heart—that, if only a child's heart, was yet a girl-child's heart—a desire, innocent, human, feminine, for pleasure and companionship and the unknown joys of the world, she would look at him for sympathy : his unresponsive face would but mock her with the feeble ghost of a sunless smile, that tried to light his face when he looked at her, who was his sun. She was still but a child, although seventeen summers had come and gone to ripen the pale corn-colour of her hair into red gold, to deepen the blue of her sad young eyes, to mould into form the

rose-leaf sensitive lips ; but a child unnaturally burdened. Marius, octopus-like, had twined his long arms around her, sucking the blood from her cheeks and lips, the light from her eyes. He had claimed from her, and had from her, everything ! She had striven for knowledge and for light, but his dull brain had mocked her with its unseeing. Pure and fresh and free she would have been, but his inert body had caressed her with all an idiot's animal-like desire for contact, clinging to her side, hanging his heavy head on her lap, crushing her under the weight of his dreadful personality. And now Marius was dying !

The room he lay in was large and bare, the carpet thick, the window grated. He lay on a big low bed, curiously surrounded with twine netting ; and she stood beside the bed and tended him timorously—for it had been a scene to make the stoutest heart quake—but gently and with unutterable pity.

The sun streamed into the room and slanted a dusty shaft of light right on to Marius's face—the convulsed and swollen face of a dying idiot. The dusty shaft of light brought into relief every hideous feature of that death-bed—the writhing figure, the large head rolling from side to side, its

unseeing, squinting eyes strained and bloodshot ; the blood-stained foam gathered in the corners of the mouth and on the spotted and disordered sheets, the feeble twitchings and tremblings that still remained now that the violence of the epileptic fit had worn itself out.

His shrieks were still ringing in her ears as she had heard them for hours—endless, terrible, anguish-haunted hours ; but now the utterer was dumb. Feebler and feebler grew the movements, duller and more glazed his eyes ; a clear whiteness seemed to wipe out the dusky pallor of the skin. His cheeks fell in, the tortured eyes were closed, and the loose lips stiffened into rigidity.

Epileptic in his cradle, idiotic in his boyhood, dying horribly before manhood was reached, Death dealt with him more pitifully than life had ever done—smoothed his distorted features, closed his expressionless eyes, and stilled him into a dignity of repose he had never known.

But the death that stilled him appalled her yet more than all else she had suffered. What did she see that made her start and shudder, and rush from the room, her hands before her eyes to shut out the sight, her heart beating violently with a new strange pain and fear, her legs trem-

bling under her, and her lips white and strained with dread?

Only this : in the dying, back had come to the unfortunate boy the semblance of that sentient soul of which disease had robbed him ; it illuminated him, and now in the dead face Lucilla could see a likeness—a likeness that appalled her, for it was a likeness to herself. Her weakened mind, unhinged with the long strain, saw the flicker of intelligence in his face ; she pressed her hands to her brow :

‘ My God ! my God ! he has taken my brain. I am like him ; he is like me. O God ! Oh, help ! the room is going round me ! I am dying ! I am going mad——’

She sank upon the floor, and there they found them both, hours after—the boy dead and calm on the bed, the girl writhing and moaning on the floor.

Lucilla went through an illness after that : long nights of fever, when she would rave that Marius was near her : he was sucking her brain with his damp kisses on her forehead ; she would shriek that his cold blue hands were around her throat, and that he was crushing her under his loose ill-guided movements. Long days of semi-con-

sciousness, in which Marius was ever before her. She would start as she had been startled from her sleep that April morning, by his screams, wordless, as of some dumb animal in mortal pain. She would see again his convulsions as the epileptic demon tightened its hideous grasp and shook him with an earthquake force, until arms, and legs, and loose bitten lips, and heavy head, all shook and trembled, and were flung about directionless in that remorseless shaking ; and then she would lie quiet after that vision, her heart turned to stone, the big drops of perspiration on her forehead, waiting, waiting dreadfully, until that same demon should seize her and rend her, and make her hideous and hateful as he had been hideous and hateful to all who saw him.

So she lay for many weeks, not realizing her freedom, nor knowing that Marius was at rest in his grave, seemingly drifting to join him before her girlhood could shake off the burden and taste the fruition of womanhood.

And Roland might have remained as ignorant of her condition as he had been neglectful of her interests, but for the fact that doctors have consciences, and Dr. Grey was no exception to the rule.

Rolly had had a deep bout of drinking after Marius's death, to help to drown the remembrances it evoked. Marius it was who had made of Rolly the father that he had been. Rolly had a gentle vein in him—men of his stamp are not unkind to little children—but from his earliest infancy his boy had damped any possible pride of fatherhood. The intelligence, which is the charm of dawning childhood, had never beamed out of Marius's eyes ; that dull, heavy look, growing duller as the years rolled on, never encouraged his ambition nor flattered his paternal pride. His only son, Marius, never calling on the name of 'father,' never giving back baby-smile for loving glance, grew through dull babyhood to vacant-eyed childhood, when he stopped speechless on the threshold of understanding. Rolly was nervous enough, and imaginative enough, to see in the boy an embodied sin—to see in him also his frail young mother's transmitted revenge. He never looked upon the boy, nor upon the girl, that was his living complement, if he could help it ; and he drank deeply after Marius's death, giving rare orgies downstairs, surrounding himself with friends, while Lucilla fought her lonely battle between life and death. But Dr. Grey felt

it his duty to speak, and speak he did, and to the purpose.

‘I want to speak to Mr. Lewesham,’ he said to the footman one evening, as he came downstairs, disheartened, from his patient.

The footman was laden with a tray of glasses ; the sound of many voices and loud laughter and the fumes of smoke, came through the half-open dining-room door.

‘The master is engaged,’ answered the man doubtfully, looking first at his tray, then at the door.

‘Never mind if he is engaged or not ; my business is important. Announce me,’ he said peremptorily.

John put the tray down, threw open the door, and announced ‘Dr. Grey.’

The room was full of men ; they had evidently been just dining, and had the unrestraint of satiety. Two or three women he could also distinguish, undraped, diamond-sprinkled, talking loudly, smoking cigarettes, and lounging in easy attitudes. The smoke-tainted atmosphere, and the incense with which Nettie’s rooms were always filled, sickened him, fresh from such a different scene. But he stood his ground.

Rolly was in the first stage of intoxication, flushed, nervous; he had been laughing with the easily aroused laughter of the semi-inebriate. But he staggered quickly to his feet when he saw the Doctor.

‘Do you want me?’ he said hurriedly. ‘Don’t come in here. Weekly dinner—all my staff—matter of business—you understand.’ He tried to explain, as he hurried him into a smaller and quieter room at the end of the passage. ‘What is it? You want to speak to me: nothing wrong, I hope? Excuse me sitting down, I’ve been laughing so, I’m quite done up.’ He burst into weak laughter, but relapsed into silence under the contemptuous look of the man who regarded him. ‘Sit down, won’t you? Have a drink? I must have one; I am as dry as a bone. Ring the bell for me, there’s a good fellow; it is such a confoundedly long way off.’

The Doctor rang as he was desired.

‘A bottle of soda-water,’ he ordered, when the man appeared.

‘By Jove! it is serious then,’ said Rolly, with an attempt at jocularly, ‘if I’ve got to hear it on temperance liquors.’

‘If you can control your hilarity for a few

moments,' said the Doctor sternly, 'I shall be glad. I will not detain you longer, and you can, if you then wish, return to your boon companions.'

'Well, sit down, anyway ; it gives me the jumps to see you standing over me.'

Rolly's hands were trembling as he filled up his glass and drank off a long draught of soda-water. The Doctor looked at him steadily for a moment or two. They were men of the same age, and Dr. Grey had known Rolly from the days he first came to London. Rolly had had the advantages of more money, more leisure, more talent ; but the Doctor had had strength of purpose. He thought of Rolly's youth and promise as he looked at him now, the fumes of the wine passing off a little, and the restless vitality of the man flickering in his blue eyes.

'Speak out, Doctor ; don't stand there staring like a mute at a funeral !'

'At your son's funeral I was mute,' said the other quickly, putting his chair opposite Rolly's and holding him with his eyes, 'though perhaps I should have spoken. Do you remember these children's mother?' he asked abruptly.

Rolly shuddered ; the incident with the children's mother was one that even Rolly had never learnt

to look upon lightly. There are some things that may not be written about, cannot be printed, that fester in darkness, for lack of the ventilation which a chaste government and some narrow purists deny them. She had been pretty once, this poor strayed Jenny, this long-dead and soon forgotten victim of one of Rolly's sins. Grey had known her and pitied her.

'I—I—what the devil do you mean by coming here and asking me about that—that——'

'That unfortunate girl you ruined,' continued the other quietly. 'Don't bluster, and don't pretend you have forgotten; but listen to me for a few moments, and then do as you like.'

'Speak on,' said Rolly sullenly, taking another draught of the soda.

'The girl died; I attended her for you. I spoke to you pretty plainly and seriously then, you will remember—you were not as far gone as you are now—and you repented and vowed and swore that no other should ever suffer through you as she had done. I warned you they were delicate children; they would want every care. I told you of the dangers they would run, and you promised me if I would help you then that you would take the children and care for them.'

‘I took them to my mother,’ interrupted Rolly ;
‘it was the best thing I could do for them.’

‘But since she died?’

‘I could not help her dying!’

‘But you could help leaving them upstairs, un-
guarded, uncared for, neglected ever since.’

Roland answered not a word.

‘Shall I tell you what you have done? You
ruined, degraded, cast on the streets, and murdered
the children’s mother ; and an even worse murder
you are perpetrating now upon her daughter—
upon that poor, dying child upstairs.’

‘Lucilla—dying!’ Rolly staggered to his feet
and faced his accuser. ‘Dying—and I—what have
I done to her?’

He put his hair back from his forehead. His
senses were not fully alert ; the shadow from the
past obscured them. He remembered the girl’s
mother ; but the girl—what had he done to the
girl?

‘The boy was an epileptic—don’t ask why ;
you have not forgotten all those incidents—the
girl was nervous, impressionable, delicate ; you
have left them together and alone, until the one
has acted upon the other like some corrosive fluid
—has eaten into her life and into her brain, until

she is dying, literally dying, of Marius, the only companion you have given her. Dying of neglect, of solitude, of that sloping-roofed attic pressing down upon her, of hopelessness and fear, and the deprivation of all that should have made her life happy!

‘Wait a moment ! Wait a moment !’

The Doctor was drawing on his gloves.

‘I have nothing further to say ; you can take your own course. It was my duty to speak, and I have spoken.’

‘Grey’—Rolly’s voice was broken ; Rolly’s eyes had tears in them—‘Grey, just tell me’—his voice sank to a whisper—‘is it too late?’

The Doctor was already at the door ; again he heard the sounds of laughter, and the mingled scents of the house were about him—the close-laden atmosphere of incense and smoke.

‘I don’t know,’ he said abruptly. He waved his hand in the direction of the dining-room. ‘Tell them all about it ; laugh it over with them. Hell would make a joke of it ! Take those women upstairs and let them hear your daughter’s ravings ; write a column about it afterwards !’

He slammed the door after him ; he was gone.

CHAPTER III.

A SLOPING-ROOFED attic. When she woke, when she looked up, the roof came down upon her ; there was no room between her and the roof for Marius. Marius must lie closer to her, must crush her ; and all the phantoms that mocked her must have no room to disport in, but must press about her, and make the air heavier and heavier until her eyeballs were on fire with them, and her head stone-heavy.

She would put up her hot hands and touch that overhanging ceiling, to keep it off, to hold it up. But one day when she woke the ceiling was gone—it had moved higher up, a long way higher up, right out of her reach. And her head was lighter, the pain in her eyeballs gone. Marius was no longer there ; the figure by her side was not Marius.

She opened her eyes and looked at it.

‘ You are better ? ’ someone asked eagerly.

‘Much better,’ she answered, in her weak voice.
‘Where is the ceiling?’

Rolly—it was Rolly who stood beside her—felt the tears start to his eyes. Grey had been right. He stooped and kissed her forehead.

‘You are in another room. Get better, Lucilla, get better; I did not know you were ill.’

‘You are my father?’

A smile stole over her face. It had once been her happy day-dream that her father should know her and love her: the day-dream was coming true.

Rolly sat beside her; he held her hands, he put his head on the pillow beside her. Weak as water, easily influenced, Rolly was repentant. Last night, after Grey left, he dismissed his friends; he had the girl taken downstairs into a better room; he kept vigil beside her. Nettie made no objection; Nettie thought Lucilla was dying, and there would be an end of the annoyance she always felt that Rolly should have someone beside herself belonging to him.

But Rolly’s vigil had brought him tender thoughts in which Nettie had had no part. So fair and sweet and pure as Lucilla looked against the pillow, so had her mother looked once. Hell;

yes, it was to hell he had sent the mother, and it was through terrible sufferings she had entered the gates. It was hell looming before him ; the shaking, trembling wretch could see its yawning flame and belching mouth in the dark stillness of the night ; but there was a hope for him, a salvation for him : he seized upon it. He would save Lucilla, he would be good to Lucilla ; it was his only chance.

The hot fit of repentance and virtue was on Rolly just then. He watched by Lucilla ; he caressed her. There awoke in the girl's heart a passionate love and admiration for her father. She got well so quickly that even Dr. Grey was surprised. The colour came back to her cheeks, the light to her eyes, until one day, Rolly, coming up as usual in the morning, found her up and dressed, awaiting him, proud and glad to show him her recovered strength.

‘ Why, Lucy, up, dressed, all right again ! That’s jolly. Come down and have some lunch ; it will be a change for you.’

She flushed with pleasure.

‘ Downstairs—down with you ? Oh, father !’

‘ Why not ? Your proper place is downstairs now ; you have grown too old for the nursery.’

But Rolly coloured, for she had been too old for the nursery for a long time, and he had not thought to ask her to leave it. But his spirits had risen during her recovery: seeing her up and well this morning they rose yet higher; his mercurial temperament rose as quickly as it fell.

What a life a girl of seventeen must have led if lunching with her father appeared in the light of such a happiness as it did to poor Lucilla!

Nettie was not in the drawing-room when they went downstairs. She had an attack of neuralgia—a frequent ailment with Nettie when she was bored—and she had been very much bored since Rolly had taken to virtue and nursing his daughter. But the room was not empty. Two men were there, one of whom looked up, struck with astonishment at the figure of Rolly supporting this fair and slender child, and Rolly was evidently embarrassed by Mordaunt's look of astonishment.

‘Hullo, Mordaunt, you here already! Hope I haven't kept you waiting?’ he said, as he put Lucilla in an easy-chair. ‘This is my daughter—she's been ill. Lucy, this is Mordaunt Rivers, my assistant-in-chief. I'd call him my sub-editor, only as he alters most of my “copy” and argues

with me about the rest, I suppose he considers the boot is on the other leg.'

'Your father is rather inclined to be "stodgy," Miss Lewesham,' answered Mordaunt easily. 'And he is apt to repeat himself: you see, it is difficult to put in the gag with a light hand when you're "blind."'

'Blind?' echoed Lucilla feebly.

She was feeling very happy, gazing around her with great interest. The two men attracted the least part of her attention; she leaned back, unconscious of Mordaunt's good looks, of the admiring glances Sinclair Furley was casting on her. The self-consciousness that commences to agitate the breast of a girl of seventeen in the presence of the other sex did not touch Lucilla; her imagination was sexless. The clinging of Marius was all she knew or had experienced of the love of man—an experience that would cool a Messalina.

But she was no longer to live alone, with the ghost of Marius, in the nurseries: that was the joy of it!

She sat at her father's side, she was introduced to his friends, and she felt happy; the sadness died out of her eyes, that were humid with pleasure,

and Mordaunt Rivers, who at first observed her with something like interest, thought :

‘Heartless little devil! Might be Nettie’s own daughter. Her twin brother hasn’t been dead a month, and she is as jolly as a grig.’

Mordaunt, of course, did not know what sort of an only brother Marius had been, and could not take into consideration Lucilla’s sense of freedom from the incubus that had weighed her down, her intense wish and hopefulness for the love—the paternal love—she had missed until now.

Lucilla forgot to grieve for Marius, not, as Mordaunt thought, in the pleasures of the table, or the furtive admiring glances of Sinclair Furley, for, in truth, she paid no attention to the former, and never saw the latter ; but simply because there was a kindly glance in her father’s eyes when he looked at her, a kindly touch now and then, a remembrance of, and affection for her.

It was a small luncheon-party for Southampton Row, where open house was kept at all meals. Mordaunt was always there; his brown beard and gray eyes were familiar features. The *habitués* were accustomed to his cool cynicism, to the way he snubbed Rolly, and the way Rolly depended upon him, and was influenced by him, though

Lucilla took some time to get accustomed to it. Some said that, with all Rolly's cleverness, if there had been no Mordaunt there would have been no *Footlights*; certainly the journal owed a great deal to his versatile pen.

Sinclair Furley was a protégé, almost, one might say, an invention of Rolly's. He was English by birth, but French by nature, sympathies, and education. Two or three years ago Rolly had heard him in Paris at a very third-rate *café chantant*, and had enthusiastically and promptly imported him for the 'Leggeries.' There he would have been—was, indeed—a success: but as obscenity was sprawled in large letters over his every song and every gesture, a timely hint from headquarters cut short his stage career. Now he had two columns to himself in *Footlights*, entitled 'Bonbons,' written in the broadest French, translated into the mildest English, in which the humour of the whole thing consisted. By descent he was a gentleman, yet he did not disdain an engagement at the Passion-flower Club—that famous resort for hereditary legislators and ladies of the stage. Rolly had introduced him there. Soul and body were narrow and mean; he fixed his fish-like eyes on Lucilla, gloating over the beauty that even in this undeveloped first period

of her girlhood was rare and exotic. A gold and white harmony of hair and skin, with touches of perfect colour in the blue and rose of eyes and lips.

‘What an exquisite child!’ he murmured under his breath; but he need not have been so careful, for Lucilla heard, but paid no heed, and cared not.

Two more men dropped in later—Sinclair’s brother Tom and Lord Lusher. The first, a journalist with little to do, and much time to do it in, which he lavished freely in the company of anyone who would supply him with free smokes, free drinks, and a little ‘ready’ now and then. The other, a gentleman, very youthful, who, having had his first attack of D.T. in Rolly’s house, after one of Rolly’s supper-parties, felt himself under an obligation that his constant company could alone repay.

They talked and ate and drank — Rolly profusely hospitable, more and more brilliant as the wine went round, but occasionally remembering to pay his daughter this or that attention of the table. Lucilla was very quiet, listening a great deal, answering in monosyllables when spoken to, and striving very hard to follow what was going on.

Tom Furley and Mordaunt had been to a funeral that morning, and they were discussing it, Rolly joining in.

‘Had to stand all the time ; no press tickets, and no stalls,’ said Tom.

‘Poor old Muggins! he had to take a back seat himself—front row was all engaged,’ retorted Rolly, who had not been to Willesden, but could not let a joke pass.

‘He was late, too,’ grumbled Tom, with his mouth full of pigeon-pie.

‘Very. His duns think he should have been there years ago ; they’d have been a bit in pocket.’

‘Are you going to notice the performance?’ asked Lord Lusher, waking up from the contemplation of his glass, and suddenly realizing that they had been somewhere, he had not gathered where.

The joke told.

‘Of course, we’re going to slate it,’ answered Mordaunt quickly. ‘The rev. gentleman spoke his lines too slowly.’

‘And the leading performers never spoke at all.’

‘And Rivers gagged, so I couldn’t catch the refrain,’ etc.

Lucilla was very much at sea. They spoke an argot of their own, these contributors to the *Guzzler’s Gazette*, these popular members of the ‘Cormorant’ Club and the ‘Ooferies’—an argot that she could not follow.

In deference to her innocence, which they could not ignore—to her youth, which they could not overlook—they left out the good stories about Totties and Maudies and Claras who were not ‘*De Vere* ;’ but even then they had a large field equally barren to her. But after a time, when they left the luncheon table and went into another room to smoke, Roland as well as the others forgot Lucilla’s presence. They grew interested in some new operetta that was being discussed—more men dropped in; the arguments grew warm.

She sat quietly in a corner and listened; she was quite happy in being unnoticed. She felt terribly ignorant, and was quite astonished at the number of words and phrases she could not understand. The celebrities they seemed to be discussing she had never heard of. She put her darkness down to defective education, and made an inward resolve to ask her father, that dear father of hers, to help her to learn—to tell her what she must read to make herself more fit to be a companion for him.

Every now and then she would meet Sinclair Furley’s eyes fixed upon her; they would make her feel uncomfortable, and she would look the other way. His lank and unlovely countenance, the sickly yellowness of the face under the straight black hair, repelled her.

Lord Lusher's beardless face and bloodshot eyes, his knock-kneed youth, his besotted and feeble manhood, did not arrest her eyes. Even Tom Furley's untidy bigness presented no attractions for her.

But all the attention she could spare from her father was devoted to Mordaunt Rivers. His tall easy figure, his broad shoulders, appealed to her. She thought the mouth with its well-trimmed brown beard looked kind when he smiled, and he smiled often ; she thought his eyes were nice when they followed his mouth in the smiling. She admired the deftness of his hands as he rolled up his cigarettes ; his nails were trimmed to the fingertips ; his fingers were long, and there was a muscularity about them that one noted in none of the others. She had ample time to note all these things, even the cling of the gray morning suit, the neat boots, the white cuffs ; she noticed and watched, because no one spoke to her. Her father's guests had not found her interesting ; she was too young, too little in their world. Sinclair would have liked to have conversed with her just to have seen ' what she was made of,' but he had an appointment, and went away soon after lunch. She would have liked Mordaunt Rivers to have taken some notice of her, she thought, but he did not then.

CHAPTER IV.

THE reception-rooms in Southampton Row were curious—they all opened into each other like a set of Japanese boxes. Four rooms in all, the one in front, which was used as a dining-room, being the largest ; from that they grew gradually smaller until the end one, which was little more than an extensive recess. They were all untidy, artistic, scrappy. Chippendale furniture, old prints and caricatures on the walls, curtains in dirty art colours hanging wherever curtains were possible ; blue china and pampas grasses filled up corners ; portraits of every type of actresses and professional beauties, framed and unframed, on easels and on walls, testified to the tastes of the inhabitants.

It was close on four o'clock when Nettie came into the smoke-laden atmosphere ; for one peculiarity of this build of room is that the fumes of tobacco penetrate from one to another and linger always in the portières and draperies.

She came into the room with an expression on her face of serious ill-health, attired in a clinging tea-gown that accorded well with her expression. The *habitués* of the house gathered her mood at once from her face ; for ill-health they read at once ill-temper, and prepared at once for its ebullition. Roland recognised it too ; he was used to it, and prepared for battle.

What was the secret of the influence Nettie had over Roland it would be difficult to discover ; yet their frequent quarrels never resulted in anything but the consolidation of her position ; and they had already lived together nearly ten years ! Nettie's was a rudimentary nature ; there was no finish about her—passionate, ill-considered, unreasonable, a violent temper, and an entire absence of reticence. She was an Irishwoman, and must once have had all the proverbial beauty of her race ; but the years, most of them spent behind the footlights, had robbed her of freshness. Her features were still small and good ; but she had supplemented the fading brilliancy of her hair with aureoline, of her cheeks and lips with carmine, of her eyes with kohl.

‘Poof ! how close this room is ! You might have had more consideration for me, when you

know how frightfully bad my neuralgia has been,' she commenced ; but as she was adding to the denseness of the apartment by smoking a cigarette as she entered, the remark lost something of its point.

One or two men got up quickly to hand her a chair, but, rejecting them, she went on :

‘ Thank you ; Rolly has got my chair, though he had not the civility to offer it me.’

Roland elevated his eyebrows, but made no effort to rise.

‘ And since when has this been your particular chair ?’ he asked ; for time had robbed their intercourse of its little courtesies.

The conversation was entirely suspended while the visitors waited to see what was the next move of the little termagant. One or two, however, found they had pressing appointments—a not uncommon occurrence when Nettie was, in the language of the clique, ‘ Cattie ’—and hastened to make their adieux. But others waited to see what was the real cause of the so-called neuralgia ; for the ailment was rarely autogenic, but had its rise in external circumstances, which she generally exposed naïvely without much delay.

With the air of a martyr she took a low chair

and sat silent for a few moments, puffing with short, jerky, feminine puffs at her cigarette; her head supported on her hands, and her attitude and expression intended to denote acute suffering.

An unlucky sneeze from Lucilla in her retreat gave Nettie the very opening she was looking for.

‘What on earth is that child doing here?’ she asked, sitting suddenly up and staring at her as if utterly shocked and startled at the apparition.

But no one was taken in by her. The moment the words had left her lips Roland knew as well as if he had been upstairs while she was dressing that one of the household had detailed to her the history of Lucilla’s appearance on the scene, and it was this she was about to resent. He wondered he had not guessed it before; and, of course, her tone aroused the antagonistic part of his weak nature, and even before he answered his determination in Lucilla’s favour was riveted.

‘What should she be doing here?’ he answered, sitting up in his chair and preparing for the fray. ‘Is not a daughter’s proper place in her father’s drawing-room?’

‘I did not know you kept a lunatic asylum,’ said Nettie, relapsing into her attitude of agony.

Roland flushed with the anger that she always had power to arouse in him :

‘You ought to,’ he answered savagely, ‘since I always keep you here.’

It was curious to notice the utter want of restraint they exhibited toward each other, notwithstanding the presence of their friends—curious and, in one sense, disgusting ; for it was an indication of the fact that these two people not only disregarded the laws of conventional morality, but even of commonplace decency.

Fortunately Lucilla did not hear this remark. She had noted the hard glance of dislike that Nettie gave her when she entered, and had fled from the room, back to the solitude she knew so well.

But her father fought her battle right fatherly. His obstinacy was aroused ; he had all the wordy obstinacy of weakness.

‘She is old enough to take her place in society ; I’m not going to have her shoved up in a back room and forgotten. There’s enough room for you both in the house, God knows!’ he said, after a few more bitter words had passed, and the little knot of men began to disperse into the various rooms.

‘Society!’ sneered Nettie. ‘Pretty society’—she knew Rolly’s tender points, and social position had once been an ambition of his—‘a lot of bar-loafers and penny-a-liners!’

Nettie, in a rage, had no scruples as to whom she insulted. It is only fair to say that those who knew her never resented what she said; and those who did not were soon enlightened, and took their own course.

‘Good enough for you, anyhow—you and your pals, Jenny Farrell and Tessie Gay.’

‘Quite as good as an old farmer and a henwife.’

‘Shut up, you ——’

‘I shan’t. I won’t have my house made into an asylum. I won’t have her gibbering and raving at me. She’s an idiot; you know she is an idiot! I hate idiots! She’ll be having fits in the drawing-room, and in the streets, and all over the place. She’ll be foaming at the mouth. I won’t have it!’

Nettie stamped her foot in her rage.

Mordaunt Rivers, who had not stirred during the controversy, but had stood against the mantelpiece watching and listening with an amused smile, thought it time to interfere. Nettie had lost control over herself; Roland was white and speechless with rage. In another moment they

would have been throwing things at each other—the way their battles generally ended. Mordaunt was the only person on earth who had any influence on Nettie.

‘Nettie,’ he said coolly, ‘why don’t you let the matter rest? You know Rolly is right. Something must be done with the girl; she is not a child any longer.’

‘I’m not going to mind his bastards!’

Roland interrupted with an oath; but Mordaunt pushed him on one side.

‘Don’t interfere; what is it to you?’ said Nettie.

‘Only I like peace; and I want a drink; I can’t have either while you two are sparring like two cats.’

‘Well, you can ring for one, I suppose. You don’t want me to do it for you?’

Still, his ruse was partially successful; and by dint of asking Nettie’s advice about some point they had been discussing, and changing the conversation generally, the matter of Lucilla was dropped for the time being. The other men rallied to his aid; they were all sick of the wrangling. Other callers dropped in; tea and brandies-and-sodas, cigars and cigarettes were

produced, and the atmosphere cleared a little. Nettie recovered her amiability, and even danced a breakdown to Tom Furley's accompaniment, to emphasize how badly Tottie had done it the first night of the new burlesque at the 'Jollity.' And then Tottie came round on her way from rehearsal, and Jenny dropped in with Dicky Dormer, and they all laughed and talked and flirted and drank, and Lucilla was forgotten, and all the harsh words were as if they had never been uttered.

The afternoon waned, and there was a general move. Some were going to dress for dinner, some had to go down to the theatre; Nettie and Rolly, with two or three of the others, were due at the first night of a new piece.

Roland took an opportunity to say to Mordaunt:

'Calm Nettie down, will you, there's a good fellow? I'm not going to leave that girl alone; I shall take her with us to the "Jollity."'

'I shouldn't, if I were you. She isn't very strong; she has only just got over an illness, and her brother's death, and all that sort of thing. Don't rush it. Give Nettie time to get used to her, and all will come right.'

'Do you think it will?' asked Roland doubtfully; 'Nettie's got the devil's own temper! Tell her

not to make a fool of herself, there's a good chap. Help me a bit ; you know I'm right, don't you?'

Roland always expected someone to help him ; he was always leaning on someone, and never walked without some human crutch.

'I don't know whether you're right. For God's sake, don't talk to me here about right and wrong ! It is enough for me that you want the girl about you, and Nettie doesn't. All I've got to do is to try and keep the peace between you, so that things are not made uncomfortable all round, and the paper doesn't suffer through the lack of combination. That's all that concerns me. By the way'—carelessly—'I suppose the girl is all right?'

Rolly got white ; he looked as if he could have struck his friend. Mordaunt put his hand on his shoulder.

'Don't make a fool of yourself, Rolly ; I did not want to offend you. I heard the boy was—was a bit groggy, so I just asked, that's all.'

'She is all right,' answered Rolly, in a muffled voice ; 'there has never been anything the matter with her.'

Alas, for poor Lucilla and her high hopes in Rolly ! Rolly was a very grave of dead hopes.

He stuck to his guns gallantly. Lucilla was not to go back to her attic-room ; she was to lunch with them every day, to dine with them, to go out with them sometimes. He issued his orders, and somehow or other, never mind what arguments Mordaunt used, they were obeyed. Lucilla lunched downstairs, dined downstairs, sat about and listened to the gay talk she could not understand, to the laughter for which she never saw the provocation, to the gossip of which she never held the cue.

But still—but still she was not very happy. She tried so hard to understand ; she failed so miserably in understanding. And then it seemed to her that the loving-kindness had fled from her father's eyes, and there was in them instead when he looked at her a fear that he never put into words.

And Nettie? Nettie never scolded her, never said to her any of those harsh things she said to those around her, never molested her in any way. But, then, on the other hand, Nettie never said a kind nor an encouraging word to her. She looked at her always with cold dislike ; the sensitive girl felt she was always in the way, always the fifth wheel of the coach, the one person not wanted in that generous open household.

Her manners became timid and deprecating ;

her ignorance weighed upon her. One day she asked her father if she might have a governess—if she might try and learn something. Rolly was trying very hard to do his duty by the girl, but it was hard with Nettie against him. All his better nature, all his gentle boyhood, rose up in him when the girl looked at him appealingly with her blue eyes, when she touched him timidly with her soft lips, when she called him ‘father’ in loving tones.

But he was used to Nettie, and to his mode of life—to drinking and loose living, and even looser talking. The loose talk seemed to him a sacrilege before those innocent eyes. The girl reproached him by her presence, and he felt uncomfortable in his own home.

Then, again, Nettie and Mordaunt together had poisoned the well-spring of his love. He could not help watching Lucilla for the signs of a malady she had not—could not help listening for a well-remembered shriek, such as had driven Marius, even in his babyhood, from him.

Weak Rolly wavered and shirked and compromised; and Mordaunt Rivers had his work cut out to keep the peace.

CHAPTER V.

IT was natural Nettie should rebel against the ukase. To have a girl-child always about her, dogging her heels when Roland was absent, noting what went on, and judging it from a child's own standpoint, did not suit her mode of life at all.

Under the constant sense of irritation she grew neuralgic and snappish and quarrelsome ; and what with that, and with Rolly's uneasiness and scruples about certain anecdotes and certain stories when told before the girl, things began to be uncomfortable all round.

Lucilla was a restraint. There was no disguising the fact ; there was a looseness in the very air of the house—a looseness of manners and talk that was seriously interfered with by her presence. *Footlights* permeated the home atmosphere—all the choicest anecdotes were first brought there ; were clipped and arranged in such a form as should be compatible with the tone of the paper ; were

arranged, rearranged, added to, over lunch, during dinner, or in the hour devoted to afternoon tea and brandies-and-sodas. Realistic stories were read aloud; Roland believed in the future of realism; in literature it was a comprehensive term with him. The poems were recited with becoming emphasis. The correspondence of the paper was commented upon and enjoyed publicly; and the correspondence of *Footlights* was curious in tone. Anecdotes, whose bestiality outweighed their wit, were sent in freely, and, although not published, often formed the theme for a brilliant reply; others with wit and bestiality about equally proportioned generally found admission, with the assistance of either Roland's or Rivers's magic journalistic turn.

Anecdotes were banished, and correspondence relegated to the office, during the first weeks of Rolly's infatuation for Lucilla; and Nettie had to chafe under the fact that they were now enjoying in private what they had always hitherto enjoyed with her. She felt it was hard on her, and it undoubtedly was; for although she was not witty or brilliant in the true acceptance of the terms, she could appreciate and enjoy the wit of others, particularly on unsavoury topics, and she was in-

defatigable in fishing up information from the dust-heap of life behind the scenes.

The 'staff' missed her, and she missed them. Lucilla's appearance revolutionized the house, and nobody, even including Lucilla herself, was happier for the change. Nettie's acuteness soon perceived that Rolly was wavering in his fancy for Lucilla, that Dr. Grey's warning to him was fading from his mind, that the girl was beginning to bore him. Still, he did not confess it; he continually insisted on her appearance; but he was out a great deal more, and this Nettie resented, although she continued by her conduct to render him uncomfortable at home. Certain things and certain people he still insisted should be kept from the girl, but personally he avoided her pale wistful face whenever it was possible.

Mordaunt Rivers was a very old friend of Nettie's—their friendship dated even further back than her connection with Roland.

Nettie sat in the easy-chair by the fireside, the dulness of the day hiding her lines of age, and softening the incongruities of her complexion. The room was crowded with broken knick-knacks that spoke of orgies past—it made no pretence to what Nettie always termed contemptuously 'middle-class

cleanliness'—but was cosy and warm in its dust and disorder.

Mordaunt lounged in the chair opposite to her while she confided her grievance to him. He was well supplied with material comforts—a half-finished brandy-and-soda by his side, and a box of cigarettes open before him. He knew Nettie thoroughly; but whatever their past acquaintance may have been, in the present his feeling for her was perfectly compatible with the duty he owed his employer's wife.

Lucilla had gone to a picture-gallery with her father, so they had no fear of an interruption to their *tête-à-tête*.

'I wanted to speak to you,' said Nettie complainingly, 'but I never seem to have an opportunity now.'

Mordaunt laughed quietly, understanding well her plaint.

'What do you want to speak to me about? Do you want to know what was the row between Maude Ponsonby and his lordship?'

'No.'

'Or why they have changed the girl who was fourth from the right in the Gaiety chorus—the one with long plaits and bandy legs?'

‘No, no ; that wasn’t it ! But why have they ?’ eagerly.

‘Why, simply because she has accepted a seat in the carriage of the old Duke of B——, and a pound a week is no longer valuable to her. But if that wasn’t what you wanted to ask me about, what was it ? Nothing else has happened that I know of.’

Nettie, debarred from many female joys and companionships, found her consolation in the gossip of the *coulisses*, and Mordaunt Rivers was her purveyor-in-chief of this peculiar mental diet.

‘It is that girl,’ she said slowly.

‘That girl’ unconsciously had been much in Mordaunt’s mind lately.

‘Well ?’

‘Rolly insists upon having her always hanging about.’

‘Is he getting jealous of you in his old age and employing her as ’tec ?’ he inquired, puffing out his smoke quietly.

A sneer was as much lost on Nettie as a rebuke from the Chair on an Irish member.

‘No, no, it is not that ; but he thinks she has been neglected.’

‘So he wants *you* to introduce her into society ?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well?’

‘Well,’ she broke out impatiently, ‘I loathe girls; and I hate being spied over! I hate her stupid ways of looking as if she doesn’t understand half that is said to her! I hate her when she tries to look knowing, and I hate her when she looks innocent! Bah! it’s beastly!’

‘What, her innocence?’

‘The whole thing.’

Mordaunt threw the end of his cigarette in the fire and stood up, leaning against the dust-covered mantelpiece, with its mass of ornament, cigar-ends, and stains of sticky glasses. He was a tall man, somewhere between thirty-five and forty; handsome as far as small features and blue eyes can make beauty; manly so far as a well-trimmed brown beard and moustache can make manliness. His expression was *insouciant*—a sneer had become habitual to his lips. He despised everybody and everything about him—read them, saw their vices more prominently than their virtues; despised himself for his life and his associates, but knew he was unfit for any other. What his youth had been, or who had been his parents, no one knew. The little world he lived in knew of him only that he

was an excellent journalist, and it was currently believed in it that Mordaunt could have done anything he chose. Why he did not choose to do anything, why he had no ambitions, they never inquired. If he was celebrated among them for one thing more than another, it was for the absolutely low opinion he had of women ; he saw in them all the masculine vices, without any of the redeeming masculine virtues. On one occasion when he was giving vent to these opinions, Rolly, who knew what a good woman was, had remarked :

‘ One would think, to hear you talk, that you’d never had a mother, Rivers.’

‘ Oh yes, I had,’ he replied bitterly ; ‘ that’s just why.’

Mordaunt Rivers was frequently in Southampton Row, and Nettie always amused him. There was so little disguise about her ; she was a living exemplification of all his theories about women. Irresponsible, passionate, changeable, with a cat-like fondness for warmth and comfort ; no principle, no further guiding motive than gratification of her momentary whims—a flower of the foot-lights now running to seed.

He caressed his beard while he observed her and thought over her perplexity. It was a pity she

should be made uncomfortable ; she had a habit of making things devilishly unpleasant for everybody when she was uncomfortable. And all about Rolly's girl, too—Rolly's girl, who had enjoyed her lunch after her brother's funeral, and whose beautiful blue eyes Sinclair Furley had looked at admiringly.

‘It's hard lines on you,’ he said sympathetically.

Nettie smoked incessantly ; when she was ‘put out’ her cigarette became more necessary than ever ; her short, jerky, feminine puffs seemed to help her.

‘Hard lines ! I should think it is. I won't stand it, that's about the size of it.’

‘What will you do?’ he asked, elevating his eyebrows and smiling curiously.

‘Do—do ; I'll——’

They looked at each other, and Nettie reddened.

‘You'll leave him?’ Mordaunt laughed outright—a low pleasant laugh. ‘Don't make a fool of yourself, Nettie ! Rolly and yourself are settled for life.’

‘I don't see why,’ she answered viciously.

‘Well, I do,’ he replied coolly. ‘In the first place, you can't do better any longer ; and, in the second, you are quite devoted to him ; and the

only thing you are suffering from now is jealousy.'

'Jealousy of Rolly! Rot! Did I interfere when he mashed that slack-rope woman? Did I make a fuss when he took Jenny about with him, and everybody was talking about it?'

'No; you didn't, any more than he interferes with you and Antonelli, or Captain Anderson, or Charlie, or half-a-dozen others. But that is nothing to do with it. You don't like having this girl hanging about; and you've been in the devil's own temper over it these last few weeks! Now the question is: What are you going to do?'

Both of them smoked quietly for a moment or two. Mordaunt could say to Nettie what no one else dared; he frequently mediated between her and Roland—in fact, if it can be said that Nettie respected anyone, Mordaunt Rivers was that one. She knew now what he had said was true—a mutual tolerance was the basis of what matrimonial peace they enjoyed.

'Rolly is as obstinate as a mule when he gets an idea into his head,' she grumbled.

'He is in the right, you know,' continued her chosen adviser, quietly rolling up another cigarette. 'What is he to do with the girl? you can't expect

him to keep her always in the nursery. You had better make up your mind to put up with the nuisance ; he will tire of his intense affection very soon, you will find.'

'Her "youth and innocence" that he talks about make me sick.'

'You were young once, and I suppose you were even innocent once?'

He laughed, and she laughed, as if the idea of Nettie's innocence at any period of her life must have been a joke.

'I suppose it won't last long,' she said, when she had finished laughing.

'Which?'

'Both ; but particularly her innocence.'

'Well,' he replied, looking round him, 'it is certainly a curious atmosphere for innocence to flourish in.'

There fell a silence between them. Mordaunt's cigarette went out, and looking around him, thinking for a moment in the light of Lucilla's eyes on the aspect of the society with which he had chosen to surround himself, he could not but see it differently. The woman before him in her loose tea-gown, her pearl-powder, her paint—the many-scentedness that always hangs about such women

—struck him with a momentary sense of distaste, disgust.

Nettie was silent for a different reason ; his words struck a chord in her strange mind.

‘D—— innocence!’ she said at length.

‘Don’t,’ he said quietly ; ‘it d——s itself soon enough.’

‘Ah! you mean——’

‘I don’t mean anything,’ he said, hurriedly rising.

‘Mordaunt’—she rose and put her arms, falling back bare from her loose-sleeved gown, on his shoulders—‘Mordaunt, old pal, I’ve got an idea!’

He looked into her eyes, saw all the wrinkles, powder, paint—saw through them all ; he had no illusions about her.

‘Well, what is it?’ he asked, not unkindly.

‘Rolly’s sick of her innocence, I’m sick of her innocence ; who cares a curse about innocence?’

‘Speak out ; what is in your mind?’

Did Nettie, even Nettie, redden a little under the paint?

‘Nothing ; but’—her tone was significant—‘*it won’t last long.*’

Mordaunt put her arms from about him.

‘What will you do, Nettie?’

He wanted to hear, he wanted to assure himself, how base a woman could be.

‘I will—I will,’ she answered, mocking him, her spirits rising at some thought that was shaping itself—‘I will do—nothing. I will let her run loose. I will be a more lenient stepmother.’ She laughed; Mordaunt thought it a hateful laugh. ‘Roland would soon cease to be so proud of his daughter if—if——’

‘If she goes wrong’—he finished the sentence for her—‘and you intend not putting any obstacles in her way should she have the inclination?’

‘That’s it; you’ve hit it! I’ll give her her head a bit; I’ll——’

Nettie grew thoughtful; there was another pause.

‘Well?’ he said.

He was curious; he wanted to know what lengths she would go to, this tiger-cat of a woman, whose jealousy was directed so bitterly against the girl who had the misfortune to be her stepdaughter.

‘Well—nothing,’ she answered.

The hot fit had passed away; Nettie could only be spasmodically, not deliberately, villainous.

‘You will try and corrupt the girl as quickly as

you can. If she tries to climb out of such a morass as this, you'll give her a shove back, that's all, isn't it? What villains you women are!

He flipped away the ash with his fingers; he was stirred by some emotion that was strange to him.

Nettie looked at him in astonishment.

'What is villainous about it? I am not going to do anything; I am going to let things slide, that is all.'

'Quite right, quite right,' he said quickly. 'It serves her right; girls had no right to get themselves born in Bohemia. I don't know that anything better could happen to her than to get over it all quickly—the disgust, and—scruples—and all that sort of thing. She will enjoy herself more afterwards; she doesn't look over-happy now, poor little devil! Get it over as quick as you can, Nettie. Command me, if I can be of any assistance to you. I'm off'—he took his leave abruptly—'I hear that brute Antonelli's voice in the hall. Good-bye! I wish you luck and a speedy success.'

Nettie, too, had heard the voice of her latest hanger-on. She sat up and examined herself critically in the fancy hand-mirror lying on the

mantelshelf. She added a necessary touch of powder quickly. Lucilla faded at once and completely from her mercurial mind.

‘Do I look all right?’ she asked him.

But he had no time to answer. He got into the air as quickly as he could; it seemed to him he could not breathe much longer in that room. He had no delusions about Nettie, or, for the matter of that, about any woman. But to listen this afternoon—to see the purpose dawn in Nettie’s eyes, and so calmly; to see her devote the child to such a life as she had led herself, and be so untouched by it that at Antonelli’s entrance she could forget it all, and go on with her old flirtations and exert her well-worn fascinations—it sickened him. Lucilla’s child-like face flitted before him; it was horrible, it was beastly, to see how anxious this woman was to wipe out the childishness of the face!

Mordaunt knew as well as Nettie did that it could not last long; he had put it all into words for her. Nothing pure or virtuous could last long at 200, Southampton Row.

That evening at the Cormorant Club his talk was more bitter, more cynical, than ever. Rolly was there applauding two burly prize-fighters who

were giving an exhibition of their skill—Rolly, half-drunk as usual, talking as fast as he could, weak and muddled and vicious ; never had Mordaunt felt so bitter a contempt for him, and for himself, in that this man was his friend.

The face of the girl-child—a girl-child with Rolly and Nettie for father and mother—haunted him ; and he found it so difficult to forget that he actually avoided Southampton Row for the next week or two, until he had succeeded in calming down his feelings of pity, and restoring himself to his normal state of indifference to vice and virtue, and all that makes up the difference

CHAPTER VI.

LUCILLA had been with her father to a picture-gallery ; and the excursion had been a failure, as all their excursions together had been failures. They had been to the Society of British Artists, and it was the time when James Whistler was president of that respectable institute. Lucilla's uneducated eye had been unable to see through the mistiness of Whistler into his genius, and Mr. Stott, of Oldham, had been a nightmare to her.

Her father had seemed disappointed at her want of enthusiasm. In point of fact, Rolly had not found her companionable, and it was very patent to the girl that this was so. She wept over it when she returned home to the solitude of her room ; the habit of weeping was growing upon her.

She was so desperately lonely, this young and pretty girl ; she was lonely when with her father, lonely in the gay company in the drawing-room ; a something different from other people, a something apart.

She felt she was no use, she felt she was not wanted ; and she craved desperately, as a girl will crave, to be something to somebody ; to occupy a niche of her own, instead of being out in the cold. It is a dangerous state of mind for a girl to be in ; for she is apt to think any niche will fit her, to take any that is handy.

This was the state of Lucilla's mind on the first night of 'Faust' at the Lyceum. She had a nice dress to go in, one of Nettie's ordering—for Nettie ordered her clothes and Lucilla had no voice in the matter. The dress for that night was black ; it was cut very low and square, exposing her white slender neck, making her blush all to herself before the glass, as she tucked her chemise into her stays and adjusted the narrow straps that had to serve for sleeves.

A Lyceum first-night presents certain features that distinguish it very materially from a first-night at any other theatre ; and it was a mark of Roland's rapidly dying thought for Lucilla that he had arranged it should be her first experience of the theatrical world. The vehicles outside were aristocratic, the excitement within was decorous and suppressed. There were a few empty seats, for so careful is the management in the distribution

of tickets that some remain undistributed to the last ; and to allow payment for these at the door would detract from the valuable advertisement of the exclusiveness of the function.

There is a marked absence of those ladies usually to be found at first nights and matinées, and in their stead is the presence of many clergy other than those attached to the ' Church and Stage Guild.' The yellow heads and bare shoulders of the demi-monde are missing ; in their stead respectable dowagers, with nodding plumes, in grandmotherly frocks of violets and blacks, muster in full force. The Prince has a box with his wife and sons—a decorous family group.

Nettie, Mordaunt Rivers, and Lucilla, their entry a little late, managed to disturb two or three people, who glanced at them with that cold look of disapproval which is encountered by a late comer to church.

Lucilla was uncomfortable, and blushed at feeling that she was a mark for so many eyes, but Nettie enjoyed attracting attention in any way ; and ' respectable ' people were her natural enemies—to annoy them ever so slightly was a social triumph. She was as noticeable as she could be in gaining her seat, and stood up while taking off her opera-

cloak, surveying the house. It was the opening scene of 'Faust,'—Wills's adaptation. Something went wrong with the machinery, and the confusion on the stage was added to by the little disturbance in the stalls.

'Hush, sit down,' he answered with annoyance, and so they finally settled down into their seats.

The house was in semi-darkness ; nothing took Lucilla's attention off the stage. She forgot her low dress and all her other little vexations ; she had no eyes for anything but the piece, and it was not until the curtain fell, and the house was in brilliancy after the first act, that she had time to observe that she was seated by Mordaunt Rivers, and that Sinclair Furley was on the other side of her. In the warmth and excitement of their entry, and of following the action in the semi-obscurity of the theatre, she had slipped off her cloak. She was not thinking of herself, or of anything but Marguerite ; she was in a new and delightful world.

Sinclair roused her ; they had met but the once—that was, on the first day she had come downstairs after her illness. He claimed acquaintance, and seemed charmed that she had remembered him ; and when she had called herself back from the story that was being unfolded before her, she

looked at him with interest as he bent forward in his stall to talk to her. She had heard her father say he was clever, and her father's approval was a hall-mark in her eyes. She had heard he could sing, and was the best dancer in London. She, of course, did not know his peculiar position in either of these arts. Also she knew that he composed, and she was sufficiently unsophisticated to be impressed by this fact.

He was a man below the middle height, with narrow chest and sloping shoulders ; his unhealthy sallowness seemed transparent against the coarse black hair ; his eyes were light, curiously expressionless ; no hair grew upon his face ; the loose-lipped mouth was incongruous with his leanness. His colouring was muddily yellow, and this peculiarity extended to the nails of his white hands, and his hands were throughout curiously characteristic — boneless, fat, soft, and white, with their yellow nails ; they gave one in their scrupulous cleanliness an impression of uncleanness.

He gazed at the young girl from under his heavy lids in a way that had something unpleasant and impure about it, fixing his eyes upon her unformed bust and neck.

‘I should hardly have known you,’ he said; and she coloured again under his intent glance. ‘I could not have conceived you were so beautiful.’

Mordaunt Rivers had gone out, Nettie was talking animatedly, and not too quietly, to the editor of a rival journal; Lucilla and Sinclair Furley were practically alone.

She tried to draw her cloak round her.

‘Let me help you; but surely you would not be so cruel? You are not going to put on your cloak?’

He was still gazing at her in a way that made her feel much more keenly than she had done in the solitude of her own room her want of covering. As he spoke he helped her, touching, as he did so, her neck with his hands, and showing by his face his consciousness of the act.

He saw and appreciated her blushes and confusion, and was doubly attracted thereby. It was innocence, and that was a quality he had never before met; nor was it likely that he would, innocence being an uncommon attribute at a *café chantant*. But he recognised it here, and it excited him.

There was a poisonous suggestiveness in his manner, in his conversation. Lucilla was bewildered—alarmed. He whispered his comments on the play as it proceeded ; he called himself an artist, yet he wiped out the poetry of the story and destroyed the illusion. The lights and the music and the play all became indistinct to Lucilla. She was possessed by nothing but Sinclair Furley's breath fanning her cheek ; his words that she could but faintly understand echoing in her ear—that ear that occasionally his thick lips almost touched. He seemed ever hovering about her, even when not speaking, like some unclean bird over its prey. Mordaunt, when he returned, noted the little scene.

‘There won't be much of the unsophisticated left in the girl by the time Sinclair Furley has finished with her,’ he whispered to Nettie. ‘Just watch them.’

Nettie watched them.

‘Come home to supper,’ she said to the poet, as they were struggling with their belongings at the close of the performance. ‘A lot of men are coming ; there is sure to be enough to drink, if not to eat.’

Sinclair had Lucilla's hand on his arm as they were pressing through the crowd, and he pressed it as he accepted the invitation. 'I can't tell her how gladly I will come,' he whispered. 'I want to see more of you; I think you are my ideal!'

Lucilla's heart gave a big jump. She an ideal! Her thoughts were all jumbled together. She had thought she hated Mr. Furley; but to be admired, to be an ideal, and the ideal of a clever man—the poor, lonely, unwanted Lucilla, Marius's sister!

Nettie and Lucilla went in one hansom, Rivers and Furley followed in another. They were not congenial companions. Mordaunt Rivers was at least robust in his vices, masculine in his cynicism and contemptuousness. Sinclair was neither, and Rivers despised him. He even found himself thinking half-pityingly of Lucilla, exposed unprotected to Sinclair Furley's attention.

But Sinclair Furley, who had a vanity childish in its completeness and unconsciousness, was quite unaware of Rivers's feeling for him. He talked to him on the way home of Lucilla, and raved about her innocence and beauty; he described her

as 'distinctively virginal'—a phrase that, although it impressed itself upon Rivers, as many of Furley's speeches did impress themselves, for he was a picturesque speaker, yet inspired him with a fresh disgust of the man who made it.

But it struck him afresh when they arrived at Southampton Row. Supper after the theatre was an institution at Southampton Row; and on such an occasion as this—a simultaneous first-night at the Gaiety and Lyceum—there was quite a representative company—representative, be it understood, of Roland Lewesham's friends and associates.

All the curtains were drawn back, so that all four rooms were seen at once; and there were men in all of them, and smoke in all of them, and loud talk and laughter in all of them. There were present a couple of women besides Nettie—women of a well-known type. One was Lord Lusher's wife, but he was by no means the only gentleman to whom she had acted in a similar capacity; the other was Jenny Farrell, a most popular artiste, at present resting. Lord Lusher's wife had also trod the boards. Both these ladies and Nettie hankered after the scenes of their former

triumphs or reverses, and found their next greatest pleasure in seeing and criticising their successors. All three had hair of an 'aureoline' hue, though with one it had to accord with black, and with another with brown, eyes. All were liberal in the display of their painted, enamelled, and gilded charms.

Supper was ready, but they had waited for Rivers and his companion. They were filling up the time with loud talking and excited discussion on the pieces they had seen; on the 'legginess' of the new burlesque, and the poverty of its dialogue. Men and women alike were loud-voiced, eager, and excited. In their midst Rivers noted poor Lucilla, slender and child-like in her black dress, her blue eyes wondering; and then it was that Sinclair's phrase recurred uncalled to his mind. She was, indeed, 'distinctively virginal.'

But other things claimed his attention when at length they all sat down in the front room to the cold and plentiful supper. All the wine bottles were magnums; and soon, as the bottles began to be emptied, the fun and the frolic grew fast and furious.!

Roland, at the head of the table, seemed to have

forgotten Lucilla and his care for her. He not only drunk much, but he talked incessantly—he talked himself drunk, and in this condition was at his best and most brilliant, his ready wit making him a splendid boon companion. One joke after another, and one anecdote after another, rolled from his lips. Rivers and the other men all joined in. In this, the first stage, the conversation—though, perhaps, it would not bear repetition—sometimes approached brilliancy; and those amongst the company who had the strongest heads carried away many a neat remark that would work into their next day's ‘copy.’

Roland Lewesham did most of the talking, Lady Lusher employing herself in making vehement love to Tom Furley, which Tom responded to in the intervals between the drinking and eating; for Tom had at all times a true journalist's passion for free victuals and well-provided ladies. Nettie and Nellie reminiscenced, and talked theatre ‘shop’ with the three or four men who were nearest to them; and all the others—there were about twenty altogether—joined in the various conversations whenever they got a chance.

Lucilla sat next to Sinclair Furley; around her

the laughter and the talk, the chinking of the glasses, and the voice of Sinclair seemed to beat time in her brain with the slow cathedral music she had heard. When the talk veered from the more interesting event of the new burlesque on to the 'Faust' performance, Marguerite's peccadillo was discussed with a freedom of comment and a jocularly that may be imagined. Everyone had something to say about it ; it was an easy subject to jest on, and the women joined in. Anecdotes were freely related in which different consequences had occurred, and one suggested another, until the table was in a united uproar of 'good stories' and laughter, with easy immorality adorning each tale.

Lucilla as she listened, understanding hardly anything, yet felt her cheeks reddening. Sinclair's comments in her ear, on her delightful and refreshing innocence, seemed to her as a degradation, as a reproach ; but why or how she could not understand.

As the hours sped on, and Roland pressed the unlimited drink more and more upon his guests, the entertainment developed into a regular orgie. At length a move was made from the supper-table

by Nettie, and Lucilla gladly seized the opportunity, and went off upstairs to bed.

The room grew hotter and hotter under the combined influence of the gas and the people. The drink went round more and more freely, and the atmosphere grew thick with smoke and license. Sinclair Furley sang a song, which he called 'The Limelight Litany'—a parody of something they had heard that night, but the words are simply irreproducible in their blasphemous obscenity; but in such a company, at such a time, it 'caught on,' and soon they were all roaring out the chorus. Charlie, after surreptitiously employing himself in salting Tom Furley's champagne, and betting five pounds to his nearest neighbour that he wouldn't notice it at this time in the evening, put his feet upon the table, and announced his intention of playing them an accompaniment on the mahogany, which he proceeded to do with his heels, to the great detriment of the glasses, but to the great enjoyment of the company, including the host, who went into fits of laughter.

'The Limelight Litany' was sung again and again. In the midst of it Tom discovered his wine was salted. Truthfully, however, Charlie may be said to have won his bet; for it was only

after drinking it off at a gulp that the loud laughter of the other guests gave him warning as to what had occurred.

How the evening finished with a boxing-match between Charlie and Lord Lusher in the drawing-room, in which the furniture suffered more than either combatant ; and how they all roared when a heavy lunge from Charlie missed his opponent and brought down a couple of photograph-frames from behind him ; and when a carefully-planned blow from Lusher struck a vase of flowers from a table behind him, boots not to tell. It was a gloriously jolly evening, long famous in the annals of Southampton Row, and it was seven o'clock and broad daylight before they separated ; and even then Lord Lusher had to be accommodated with a bed, because, in addition to a black eye and a general unsteadiness, he had become obstinate and simply refused to go.

‘I don’t b’lieve in going from plash to plash like you fellowsh,’ he hiccoughed gravely. ‘If I come out to supper, I shtop and shpend the evening,’ he said ; and no arguments would move him.

As Tom Furley had seen Lady Lusher home somewhat earlier, he had not this responsibility to

contend with : so a bed was found for him—there was always one ready for such emergencies—and finally the party was broken up, about the time the servants came down, heavy-eyed and sleepy, to exclaim at the broken crockery and disorganized furniture.

CHAPTER VII.

LUCILLA awoke the next morning to unhappiness and a dull sense that something dreadful had happened. Her one glass of champagne had possessed only the charm of making her go to sleep last night without reflection or introspection, and this notwithstanding the noise that had continued until two hours ago.

She turned her aching head on her pillow, turned the pillow again and again to find a cooler spot, tried to put away thoughts and go to sleep again ; but all was of no avail. Her mouth was dry and parched, her head ached, and Sarah's appearance with a cup of tea was as refreshing as daylight after a night of fever. Sarah had been Marius's attendant ; she had nursed Lucilla through her illness. She was full of impatience to hear all that Lucy had seen and done last night ; for, of course, these orgies did not occur without the servants being well aware of what

was going on—and Sarah was eager to learn from an eye-witness what actually occurred. Sarah hankered after ‘life,’ even second-hand—it was better than none at all ; and she had looked forward to Lucilla’s appearance in society as a means of gratifying her own insatiable curiosity.

‘Well, Miss Lucilla,’ she began eagerly, handing the girl her tea, which she took thankfully, ‘and how did you enjoy yourself?’

‘I don’t know,’ answered Lucilla, uneasily turning over in the bed—‘I can’t remember ; it is all so confused. They said the play was no good, but I thought it so beautiful ; and—and——’

But then some thought struck her, and she shivered slightly.

‘And did anyone say as how you looked nice?’

Lucilla cowered down beneath the clothes ; she felt herself blushing.

‘I wish you would go away and leave me alone a little while, Sarah ; my head aches so, I want to go to sleep again. I needn’t get up yet. I will tell you all about it later.’

Sarah withdrew in a huff, her baffled curiosity more vivid than ever.

But Lucilla didn’t want to sleep, and could not

sleep ; she wanted to think. She remembered Sinclair Furley had said she was beautiful ; she tried to take pleasure in the thought, but could not. His looks were looks of admiration, yet under the bedclothes she shuddered at the recollection of them ; she felt hot as she thought of his hand on her shoulder, the feel of his knee at the supper-table as it had accidentally touched hers. She felt hot and cold in turns, miserable and degraded, yet could not find a reason or meaning for her sensations.

She was such a child in years, and such a child in education ; she was so little soiled as yet by what she had seen or heard that she did not even know why she so loathed and detested the remembrance of Sinclair Furley, and yet she loathed him, wholesomely if childishly.

She tried to reason herself out of the feeling, tried to take pleasure in his admiration, saying to herself that this was 'being made love to ;' that, according to the scarcely assimilated code, not only of Nettie and her friends, but also of Sarah, she should be proud of having a lover. But she was not proud ; she was low-spirited and unhappy.

She shed a few quiet tears in bed, and Sarah,

when she again summoned her, found her low and depressed. She tried to confide something of what she felt to Sarah ; but Sarah, not in the least comprehending, for such feelings as Lucilla's were impossible to her, administered consolation by telling her the depression was only the effect of the champagne ; and when she hinted that she did not like being made love to, Sarah laughed at her, and told her she would soon get used to that.

‘And who was it?’ she asked, her busy fingers tying petticoat-strings the while, for Lucilla's new clothes all required some assistance in their arrangement.

‘Sinclair Furley,’ answered Lucilla, in a melancholy tone. She would have liked to be proud of her new acquisition, but could not disguise that she was not.

‘The dancer?’ exclaimed Sarah, evidently disappointed. ‘I wish it had been Lord Lusher. Why, they do say he is heir to a dukedom, and he gives more than anyone who comes to the house as it is. Your actors and your writers are a mean lot.’

Lucilla only sighed again. Unfortunately she had no duties to perform, no work to do. In that disorderly, strange household no one had

any duties ; pleasure was the watchword of the establishment. When that failed, neuralgia and chloral filled up the spare time.

So all day Lucilla wandered about the empty drawing-room, still showing signs of last night's scenes, or into the dining-room, still reeking with the stale fumes of tobacco. She searched in the library for a volume of French poems that Sinclair Furley had told her of, and at length found it hidden behind some more on the library table. Then she put herself into an armchair in the small inner room and began to read, and as she read she forgot her weariness—she was delighted, charmed, excited with the glowing words.

Remembering that Lucilla had read nothing, knew no poetry except a portion of 'Samson Agonistes,' prepared for examination under her governess's direction, and Shakespeare's historical plays with copious addenda, it is not surprising that she was charmed by these verses.

They were written when Sinclair's friend De Gazet was a young man, and they were facile and glowing. He had had a certain faculty for appropriating cleverly great men's great ideas ; as one genial critic remarked of the book, 'It was an excellent book of quotations, but would have been

more valuable if the names of the various authors had been inserted in footnotes.'

One poem there had been in the book that might have made her admiration less, and her other sensations return, but fortunately it was no longer there. Mordaunt Rivers, wanting it one day for reference or quotation, had cut it out coolly from its place. It was this poem that had caused the prosecution of the English publisher of the book, and finally it had been withdrawn. Recommending it to Lucilla had indicated the bent of Sinclair Furley's mind ; and, it is no use disguising it, with the gift of expression and many talents, Sinclair Furley possessed an unclean mental stratum, and all things he touched were disfigured thereby, though he had attained by the same means a certain reputation, and a circle of admirers who found in him a loud echo of their inmost thoughts.

And Lucilla read and dreamed on until the day waned and afternoon set in. She sat alone until about four o'clock, when Mordaunt Rivers, looking no whit the worse for his last night's experience, came in.

'None of them up yet?' he said laughingly to Lucilla.

Up to now he had taken but little personal

notice of the girl, but Sinclair's admiration and his manner of expressing it recurred again to him as he saw her sitting there so childlike and so lonely. And Lucilla, in her mood—half physical depression from late hours and unaccustomed excitement, half mental exaltation from her poetical food—was glad to have a companion, whoever he or she might be.

‘No, none of them,’ she answered, looking at him anxiously to see if he were shocked at such eccentric hours; ‘but I think they are getting up, for Mrs. Lewesham’s bell rang some time ago.’

‘Well, never mind; you must entertain me until they appear, for I have some work to do with Rolly when he does come down. How did you like “Faust”?’ he asked carelessly. ‘I suppose I may smoke?’ he added.

Lucilla looked down, and fidgeted nervously with the book on her lap.

‘I don’t know.’

‘You don’t know? Well, that is strange, not to know if you liked the play or not. And what are you reading?’ he asked, taking the book off her lap. ‘De Gazet’s poems! Bah!’ He dropped it quickly, and made an expression of

disgust. ‘And what do you think of the realist?’ he asked curiously, after a slight pause.

‘What is a realist?’ questioned Lucilla timidly, ashamed again of her ignorance.

‘A realist,’ answered Rivers gravely, ‘as De Gazet writes and Sinclair Furley exemplifies it, is a gentleman who sings, writes, and paints on subjects which more decent—I beg your pardon, my definition is wandering—of which less artistic people scarcely acknowledge that they think. A realist, according to the modern acceptance of the term, is a scavenger who finds the subjects of his labours in details, which modesty leaves covered and police regulations banish from public places.’

Under this definition Lucilla remained a moment silent, and Rivers, making no allowance for her ignorance, saw a protest in her silence.

‘You don’t agree with me?’ he asked.

‘I don’t know; I don’t know anything,’ she said, rising, in a piteous tone. ‘You are laughing at me; I don’t know whether you are in earnest or in jest. Half that you talk about I don’t understand, and nobody ever helps me.’

She was struggling to keep back her tears. She looked so pretty, so helpless, so childlike, Rivers could not but pity her.

‘Poor little devil!’ he said under his breath. ‘Poor little babe in Bohemia! Don’t run away,’ he went on, holding out his arms to prevent her passing him; for she wanted to get away and have a good cry all to herself. ‘I can’t stay here all alone. If you will tell me what you want to know, I will tell you, really, without laughing at you. Don’t go.’

And Lucilla sat down again.

‘But I want to know everything,’ she said despairingly; ‘everything is so different.’

Mordaunt Rivers sat down on a low stool at her feet, and began gravely to cross-examine her.

‘You can read, I believe?’ he said.

‘You are mocking me.’

‘Do you read *Footlights*?’

‘Once or twice, but I don’t know any of the people it alluded to, and yet they seem to be celebrities. Everyone must know them but me, or you would not write about them.’

‘Certainly not,’ he replied promptly. ‘So you read the *Guzzler’s Gazette* for instruction?’

‘That is the other name of the paper? Yes, I saw one number.’

‘And you did not understand that?’

‘No,’ said Lucilla, sighing: ‘One or two of the anecdotes on the front page, and the nursery-rhymes with the strange spelling; but,’ she added truthfully, ‘I don’t think I even understood those thoroughly, for I did not think them funny; and, of course, they are meant to be.’

‘Harsh criticism,’ said Rivers gravely. ‘Really, Miss Lewesham, you are very hard upon us poor humorous journalists. Don’t you know that we make our living by these despised jokes?’

‘Are they really good?’

He examined her questioning countenance carefully.

‘You won’t betray me if I tell you something?’

‘Oh no!’ —eagerly.

‘Well, my private opinion is they are most of them very bad jokes; but the public read them, and buy them, and seem to enjoy them, so we go on making them.’

‘It is very strange,’ said Lucilla thoughtfully.

Very pretty she looked as she gazed into the fire, and it returned her gaze by throwing red glances on her cheeks and hair, and burning an unwonted depth into her wondering eyes. And Mordaunt Rivers, admiring her idly, felt vaguely sorry for her, as one is for a large bunch of grapes

hanging from the vine with all its beautiful bloom upon it, but which one knows will be cut down and the bloom brushed off before many hours are passed—then the fruit is enjoyed. Mordaunt Rivers saw no future before Lucilla but this, and was vaguely sorry. He watched her silently; then the bloom attracted him.

‘Whom do you like best,’ he asked her softly—
‘Sinclair or me?’

He took her hand.

‘I don’t know either of you much,’ answered Lucilla hesitatingly, leaving her hand in his and looking down upon them both. ‘But I think you only laugh at me; and Mr. Furley’—here she paused and blushed a little—‘admires me!’ And then she raised her beautiful eyes to his questioningly.

‘Not so innocent, after all,’ was Rivers’ unspoken and erroneous reflection; and his pity seemed to him to have been wasted.

‘Nobody could help admiring you. But you have not told me. Tell me’—he took her other hand, and she, unresisting, gave it to him; so they stood face to face—‘whom do you like best?’

Lucilla, blushing, tried to take her hands from his; she had no answer ready.

With a sudden movement he put his arm about her waist.

‘Come, tell me, or I shall have to kiss you before you are quite sure!’

But, seeing the bearded head so near to her, Lucilla drew further back.

‘No, no!’ she said, trying to get away.

He would have kissed her, for her resistance tempted him even more than her fairness; but the sudden appearance of Nettie between the curtains spoilt the tableau, and Lucilla, glad to be released, rushed away, her mind in a whirl of excitement, this time not quite unmixed with pleasure.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘WELL?’ said Nettie sharply.

‘At your service, madam,’ replied Mordaunt courteously, with a low bow. ‘I hope your ladyship has had a good rest and awoke in good spirits?’

‘What on earth were you doing with that child?’

‘I was just about kissing “that child,” when your untimely entrance balked my proud intent.’

‘Sickening!’

‘Quite the contrary, I assure you.’

‘But I thought you hated that kind of thing.’

‘I met Sinclair Furley this morning, and he was raving about the sweet Lucilla and her unapproachability. In your interests, and to gratify my own curiosity, I endeavoured to find out if his definition were correct.’

‘Bosh!’

‘It is rather bosh,’ he said, changing his tone, and flinging himself on the sofa. ‘Give me a drink, there’s a good woman, and exert your powers to soothe me after my exertions. I want drink, I want smoke; then I will erase from my memory the milky and watery charms of the reluctant maiden.’

‘Reluctant!’ retorted Nettie; ‘she did not seem to me to be very reluctant.’

Nettie was evidently angry.

‘You must give her a lesson in how to appear gracefully coy. You see, it is difficult to express that sentiment otherwise than by “struggling.” Now “struggling” is unbecoming and inconvenient, besides defeating one’s object. It is absolutely impossible under such circumstances to enjoy at one’s ease “the chaste salute of yielding lips,”’ sneered Rivers, stretching himself out in his chair.

He was keenly conscious just now of the vast difference between the girl who had just left him and the woman who was claiming his attention; he was always quite safe, however, in sneering at Nettie, because it was a language she did not understand. To swear at her or to hit her were the only two ways by which she could be brought to comprehend that you were not delighted with

her. Roland had frequently employed the former method ; but since her childhood's days nobody had tried the latter.

She resented the scene she had interrupted by sulking and being rude to Rivers. She looked upon that gentleman as her own property, almost as much as was Roland ; and she was very angry with him for any momentary wandering, resenting it more even than she did a similar aberration on Roland's part, and being less accustomed to it.

Her sulking and rudeness had their natural effect. Mordaunt Rivers was no Tom Furley—no mere 'hanger-on,' whether insulted or not, for the sake of the material good he might derive. Mordaunt went constantly to Southampton Row because the life there suited him, because there was the tie of an old intimacy between him and Nettie, because his daily work brought him into constant communication with Rolly ; but none of these motives, nor all of them combined, prevented him from taking up his hat and bidding his hostess 'good-bye' until she sent for him, after half-an-hour spent in trying to assuage her wrath. And perhaps he did not try very hard, for the contrast was so strong in his mind that he could not keep his thoughts from wandering to Lucilla—the con-

trast was unfavourable to Nettie, and in every comforting or apologetic word he said to her there lurked a sarcasm that he was unable to restrain.

He had been used to Nettie and Nettie's ways for a long time, but this afternoon she seemed to him both stale and coarse. She was ill-tempered and spiteful; but he had seen her so 'before, yet never had she irritated him so much. He almost vowed he would give up Southampton Row altogether. Nettie was growing old and dull, Rolly drank more than ever, and as for the way he allowed that girl of his to be brought up, why, it was simply disgusting!

Strange thoughts for Mordaunt Rivers! The 'Failure,' as he was called in that cheery personal column of *Footlights*. Very strange thoughts!

'What on earth makes you so glum to-night?' asked Rolly of him a few hours later, when they met at Tessie Gay's birthday-party—an annual entertainment that left Southampton Row empty for that night. And he had no explanation to offer.

Tessie Gay lived in a little house in Alpha Road, a little house lying back from the road with a garden in front of it. The long, low drawing-room was crowded with men in evening

dress and women in none, or, any way, in as little as they could manage with. Women with teeth gleaming out of red gums, lounging women with Kohl-bedaubed eyes, flashing, defiantly inviting. Tessie herself in scarlet; the dimples for which she was famous playing about her smiling face.

There were music and dancing, not very elegant dancing, romping, kissing, larking of every description. The flaring gas-brackets at the sides of the room gave out an overpowering heat. A music-hall artist—Tessie, be it remembered, was the star *par excellence* of the music-hall stage—assisted the occasion by a few verses that had been expurgated from her most popular song. Smoking was allowed, and all manners of drink were brought into the drawing-room.

It pleased the versatile Tessie to-night to lavish all her smiles and dimples on Rolly. Mordaunt, with fair Lucilla in his mind, watched her father, half intoxicated, with his arms round Tessie's waist, caressing with his ungloved hands Tessie's bare back, receiving a playful slap on the face when it pleased his fair hostess to resent a caress she had invited.

In the midst of the fun and frolic, the news ran round the room that Tessie's people had come up

from the country to wish her many happy returns of the day. Tessie's people! Fancy Tessie with people of her own—Tessie Gay! They streamed out into the hall to see Tessie's people.

In the hall waiters were hurrying to and fro with laden trays to the supper-room—trays laden with glasses and silver, and with bouquets of flowers. The hall was brilliantly illuminated, and all up the staircase hung the gleaming Chinese lanterns; more of them could be seen through the open door hanging amid the green trees of the garden, lining the pathways up to the house.

A very festive scene, lacking nothing that money could supply; but curiously set in such surroundings seemed the group, which rested weariedly on two chairs, hurriedly fetched for them by one of the waiters. Just two wholesome heavy-looking country people. A big bearded farmer, and his rustic homely wife, buxom cheeked, and bearing a more than faint resemblance to Tessie in her grosser charms.

'Ben and I thought we'd give you a surprise, knowing it was your birthday; not knowin' as you 'ad friends, and 'ad done so grand in the public line,' said the woman, looking round her with unfeigned admiration.

She had a baby in her arms—a fat and appetising baby. It crowed and held out its own brown arms.

‘There, look at ’er,’ said its mother admiringly. ‘One ’ud think it knowed its auntie, but since as Tom was the baby when you was down ’ome last, and he’s seven come Michaelmas, it can’t be that.’

Tessie, amid the laughter and encouragement of the men, took the baby in her arms. The baby smiled up in her face, then, seeing the bare blooming bosom, and knowing, poor little rustic baby, but the one cause for such exposure, pursed up its sweet baby lips, and began to seek, in that blind groping way that babies have, for its evening meal. When it resented its disappointment with loud-voiced wail, the wail was drowned in the roars of laughter and applause from the men; Mordaunt alone did not laugh, and then it was that Rolly had commented on his glumness.

‘God, what’s the matter with you, Mordaunt,’ he asked him, the tears rolling down his eyes with laughter. ‘It’s the funniest thing I ever saw; the little beggar thought it was——’ He went off again into peals of laughter.

Mordaunt turned on his heels, his lips tighten-

ing a little under his moustache, and went out into the night. The incident—small, trivial, ludicrous—had touched him. What did such a woman as Tessie Gay do with an innocent baby at her breast? The jokes of the men, and the laughter of the women, were as repugnant to him as had been Nettie's way of speaking of Lucilla.

That kiss he had not had haunted him. There was no affected modesty in the way Lucilla had resisted him, no mock bashfulness in the quick blush. She had been timorous, frightened of him—poor child, poor child!—whom Rolly had abandoned to Nettie's care, whom Nettie would give over so gladly to the blandishments of Sinclair Furley.

He took a vicious pleasure in vilifying Sinclair Furley the next few days, and even went out of his way to criticise that gentleman's latest performance in an evening paper which he occasionally worked for. Sinclair was now giving at the club an entertainment somewhat on the lines of his *Footlights* column. A medley of French and English, full of double meaning, yet capable of an innocent explanation which he carefully gave after every song and speech, pointing out how easily mistakes might have arisen and his audience

thought he meant so . . . or so. Mordaunt slashed into this and exposed it with a will ; in fact, so effective was his protest that it shut up the show. Then he felt better, took a fortnight's holiday, during which he did the racing notes for the *Guzzler's Gazette*, and gradually forgot his distaste for his friends and his pity for Lucilla.

Meanwhile, Lucilla pursued wearily the daily rounds of her empty life, striving to win affection from her father, toleration from Nettie. She thought much of Sinclair Furley and much of Mordaunt Rivers. The one had called her his ideal, had gazed at her with admiring eyes ; and he was clever. She had heard her father say that Sinclair Furley was clever, and would be the most popular man of the day when he was understood. He was also a journalist, and wrote verse. She would try to feel proud of his admiration, but an uneasy, nameless feeling stopped the pride, as she felt again the touch of his limp hands, or saw the gaze of his lack-lustre eyes.

But Mordaunt ! When she thought of Mordaunt her heart would beat and the colour would come into her cheeks. His hands were not limp ; he put his arm around her waist ; he had tried to kiss

her. She would recall that moment again and again, always with a delicious tremor.

‘Come with me to the McDougals’, Rolly? Mordaunt is out of town, and I have no one to go with,’ asked Nettie.

‘I’ll see the McDougals d——d first!’ was Rolly’s reply. ‘I’m going to the Troc to hear Tessie’s new song. Take Antonelli; it will just suit him.’

Antonelli was a young foreigner from White-chapel, with a fine voice, and a greatly exaggerated notion of what *Footlights*’ influence was in the world of art. He cultivated Nettie as a means to secure that influence; and Nettie encouraged him with all the eagerness of a woman who feels her charms are on the wane. But Nettie studied the convenances sometimes—she had the secret yearning for respectability possessed by all outcasts—and the McDougals, by their acknowledgment of her as the wife of the editor of *Footlights*, gratified her ambition.

She would not go alone there with Antonelli; she decided on taking Lucilla with her. Sinclair Furley would be there, and would take the girl off her hands. Nettie was more anxious than ever to get Lucilla off her hands, since she had dis-

covered Mordaunt in an incipient flirtation with the girl. Nettie was not really jealous of Lucilla as far as Mordaunt was concerned, for she knew by experience his tastes did not run in the direction of innocent children ; but the girl bored her and reproached her silently. In the very midst of the most engrossing flirtation with Antonelli she could find time to wish Sinclair Furley were a little bolder, and to make up her mind to give him a hint or two.

CHAPTER IX.

THE McDougals lived in Saville Row. Their house was an odd one—an architect's freak, unlike any other in the vicinity. It was a double-fronted villa, the drawing room lying on one side, the dining and consulting rooms, the latter with double doors of thick baize, on the other.

The drawing-room, low and long, was as characteristic in its way as the consulting-room. McDougal was a *dilettante* in art as well as in music and medicine ; and doors, walls, and even mantelpieces, bore specimens of his skill. The room was lighted from the sides with candles, variously shaded ; and fairy lights, surrounded with flowers, stood on shelves and brackets.

The room was already full when Nettie and Lucilla, accompanied by Antonelli, made their entrance—full of a curious-looking company.

The McDougals were lion-hunters, but from the appearance of the room they seemed to

have succeeded only in capturing a species of a fierce domestic cat. On a general survey the men were long-haired, their dress-coats with velvet collars or silk, their shirt-fronts embroidered or frayed at the edges, their faces bearing for the most part an eager or expectant look. This expectant look was not, as might be imagined, for the charms of supper, but was really only a desire to be invited to display their respective accomplishments of playing the violin, zither, or other instrument, of singing, or, worst of all, of reciting. The women also, on a cursory glance, lacked youth, freshness ; all other charms they possessed and displayed with liberality. Some of them were ladies who had held good engagements at London theatres, but who had lost them through misfortune, incompetency, or other reasons. Others were those hybrid creatures who hang between the amateur and professional stages, sometimes playing leading parts, once to oblige, for fees varying between five guineas and twenty guineas, at others accepting with alacrity a regular engagement in a very minor capacity for thirty shillings or two guineas weekly.

Others, again, were females, whose careers had been perchance doubtful, but who, by a late

marriage or an early one made public, had claims to be considered of the 'whole world'; divorcées who had married their co-'s; ballet girls who had espoused their protectors; and a substratum of so-called 'literary women,' whose instincts led them into paths where their plainness limited their footsteps; would-be Bohemians who, on the strength of an ungrammatical dress article or a cribbed art criticism, dubbed themselves authoresses, and sought the society in which their claims to influence gave them a certain false title to attention.

The entrance of the Leweshams and Antonelli created some little stir, and Mr. and Mrs. McDougal hurried up to them with profuse, almost gushing welcome. The doctor was a man above the middle height, burly, and blatantly self-important. He had once had a considerable practice among ladies of the stage, and even others; but sick-room confidences were not respected by him, and ladies visiting him in his consulting-room found it necessary to provide themselves with an efficient *chaperone*. Stories of his conduct began to be talked about, and one more scandalous than the rest was sufficiently authenticated to provoke his professional brethren to decline meeting him; and

now, though talking and even writing voluminously on certain medical subjects, his practice was reduced to occasional attendance on a few ladies whose reputations no longer required guarding.

Mrs. McDougal was a little woman, well born, well endowed, once well-looking. She had aged before her time ; lines of weakness had deepened into chronic lines of age and unhappiness ; all in her of womanliness and charm had been crushed out, and she remained a worn instrument to perform her husband's will. The world had pitied her at first, and even visited her ; but when first one and another of her husband's friends began to appear at her assemblies, merely respectable people began to withdraw, and this process being continued indefinitely, there was a very small minority, of which, by the way, Nettie was considered one, now on her visiting list.

Once, and once only, had Nettie persuaded Mordaunt to accompany her to one of the McDougals' receptions ; and then, after making inaudibly the observation that 'all the women were beasts, and all the men women,' he had abruptly withdrawn.

Lucilla stood at the door among this crowd of professionals and would-be professionals—of men

and women whose whole sentient life was passed under the glare of the gaslight or behind the footlights, or wherever garish brilliancy compensated for the absence of an actual or moral daylight. They pressed round and about her, as they surged in and out of the low drawing-room, or sat upon the convenient stairs.

Among the brilliant, showy costumes, her gray and white draperies were as distinctive as was her fair child face, still with youthful bloom upon it that no powder can equal or imitate with success. Even Nettie, well and tastefully dressed and arrayed as she was, and a really pretty woman to boot, looked meretricious and unattractive beside her.

But youth, beauty, fairness, innocence, were not appreciated in that 'struggling' company. Nettie, as the wife of the editor of *Footlights*, and popularly supposed to 'boss' that incorruptible journal, had a little court of flatterers around her; whilst Signor Antonelli, the 'coming man' as he was considered, although in truth he never 'came' any further than to such houses as this, was also greatly sought after by aspiring hostesses; and the McDougals pressed him to oblige the company with just one little song, with a fervour positively

touching, considering what a difficulty it must have been to him to withstand them so long.

But Lucilla had no court, and nobody asked her to do anything. She stood as near to Nettie as she could get, and hoped someone would speak to her ; she could not help feeling neglected, although it was a feeling she was accustomed to. It was not within the limit of her philosophy to recognise that a professional company of this standard has no thought to spare out of its own small world of managers, rival performers, and critics. She fell to thinking to whom she would like to be introduced, and looked around her among the men, vainly endeavouring to discover some hero who should correspond to the girlish dreams in which she had lately begun to indulge, of someone who should give her the love her father had denied her.

He must be as handsome as Mordaunt Rivers, and admire her as much as Sinclair Furley, but he must be without the cynicism of the first, and without that—that indescribable quality which revolted her in the second. And thus thinking and then looking around her, feeling both lonely and neglected, her eyes met Sinclair Furley's fixed upon her with an ardent admiring glaze. A

vivid blush flushed her cheek as she returned his bow. She felt a throb, something between gratified vanity and physical shrinking, as he approached her. He pressed her hand. He looked all the admiration and interest his expression could command.

‘How perfectly charming to meet you here,’ he began. ‘I have been thinking of you ever since that night at the play. Now we can have a good talk. We will find a seat somewhere quiet.’

‘Signor Antonelli is going to sing the “Maid of Athens” to Mrs. Lewesham’s accompaniment,’ answered Lucilla, as a nervous protest against his gesture that she should accompany him out of the room.

‘You will come afterwards, then?’ he said eagerly. ‘I have so much to say to you.’

She assented, having no excuse ready; and she felt less neglected and lonely standing there with him beside her than she had done when alone.

And Antonelli sang the ‘Maid of Athens,’ as she had so frequently heard him with Nettie. It was all expression. The bearded, rolling-eyed young Jew gave out the familiar words with a thrilling unctuousness of love, an abandonment of

himself to the passionate words of the refrain that drew forth thunders of applause from his female audience. He opened out his arms as if for the heart that he asked for, and clasped them again to his breast as if with despair at their emptiness ; but, alas ! as the softened r's rolled out of his loose-lipped mouth, he called it ' Bweast,' and above the delicious pathos rang the yet more mournful note of a defective upper register.

Sinclair drew Lucilla away when he had finished, and she went with him not altogether reluctantly. The high-strained sentiment of the song touched her. She had an unconscious longing or curiosity to find out the secret of a passionate love. She did not know that Sinclair Furley was the last man in the world to teach it to her, though perhaps she dimly divined it later. They found an unoccupied lounge on the landing outside the bedroom door.

'At last,' he said with a sigh of satisfaction, 'we are alone !'

For a few moments he said nothing more, but contented himself with looking at her in an intent and devouring fashion. Lucilla began to be uncomfortable with him now, as she had been uncomfortable with him before.

'Talk to me,' he said at length. His voice

was soft, *trainante*, but there was in it some of that colourlessness that characterized his whole person. 'I must know what you do, what you think. Do you dance? I am sure you dance.'

'I—dance!' stammered Lucilla, startled at the suggestion. 'Oh no; I am sure I could not.'

'I am sure you are clever. I am sure you could dance. I am a good judge, and I see it in your walk. Did you ever hear Margaret Taylor? I invented her. I told her she could sing, and she sang and had an enormous success. You are cleverer than she is. I can see it. You must let me give you lessons. We will get up an entertainment together. You shall be the *ingénue*. I will instruct you, and will begin by dancing. "The Dancing Lesson" we will call it. It will make a great sensation; it has never been done before.'

'But I cannot dance,' she said slowly, colouring as she spoke; and he noted the meaningless colour, and misunderstood it in his wonted manner. 'I don't think I should care to dance.'

'I am sure you would'—he looked at her more fixedly and admiringly—'or why was that beautiful figure made? Tell me, shall we do this show

together? I will help you with the form, the manner; but you must be candid and unrestrained with me. It is no woman's kisses that have thrilled those red lips of yours into such warmth of hue. You must tell me all——'

'There was my father,' faltered Lucilla, knowing she was misunderstanding him, and feeling very silly in having no way to parry or end the inquisition, which would lead nowhere, and which she almost felt awkward in admitting would lead nowhere. Cheeks and lips grew hotter and hotter, and her head drooped as she listened to him.

Two men, one of them Sinclair's brother Tom, were leaning against the banister beneath them; the other was a newly-elected member of the Cormorant Club, who had written an unsuccessful play.

'Your brother is going it,' he said. 'Who is the pretty little maiden?'

'Rolly Lewesham's daughter. Pretty little thing, isn't she? but too mawkish for my taste. She is by way of being innocent and unsophisticated, and all that sort of thing, don't you know. Mordaunt Rivers calls her "The Babe in Bohemia."'

'I should think she stands a chance of not

retaining her innocence very long, with your brother as guide, philosopher, and friend.'

'Which only shows how little you know Sin. Men who talk never act. I don't know a fellow—at least, not in our lot—with whom she is safer than she is with him. He is the sort of fellow who will sit all night long at a woman's feet longing to kiss her, and never having the pluck to get up and do it. Nobody knows old Sin like I do. He has a reputation for being a perfect devil among women, and he likes people to think that of him. In reality he is frightened to death of them, and never has had a genuine "affair" in his life.'

Then they passed on to other topics, but Tom had given a pretty correct diagnosis of his brother's gallantries. Lucilla, however, could not know Sinclair's weakness. She only knew that he was making love to her, and that it was not altogether a pleasant process. He was as much in love with her as it was in his power to be with anybody; and he was perfectly charmed with his own sensations, and quite determined to put them to some artistic use. In the meantime he would make her his confidante. There should be between them a friendship, an intimacy of intercourse, such as Dean Swift's with

Stella, Chopin's, Alfred de Musset's, Heine's with George Sand. His jejune temperament did not need any convincing of her talents. Such a friendship as he was contemplating necessitated talent on both sides—a supplementing and completing talent. Lucilla in vain denied that she had any terpsichorean ability or ambition. It only convinced him that her talent must be dormant, and it needed him to develop it. In the meantime he glided easily into talk about himself, his ambition, his work. Sinclair Furley believed in himself and in his reputation. When his performance had been greeted by one unanimous howl of disapprobation from the press, he had been delighted ; he had written explanatory letters to each editor, some of whom, being short of ' copy,' had published them. This he called getting up a controversy, and he would insist it was the only way to succeed nowadays. When he had been called an æsthete his soul had revolted in print, and he had explained voluminously the difference between an æsthete and a realist. Now he was planning a big show, and his delight was huge at finding a listener to whom he might explain its scope. They sat on the lounge together, these two, for a time which seemed to Lucilla well-nigh interminable. Nobody interrupted them, nobody wanted either of them.

Sinclair's habit of talking constantly about himself and his works—past, present, and future—rendered him a companion that men fought shy of; and it may be doubted whether women found in his society the charm that he imagined, although it was his unvarying plan to flatter their presumed vanity by suggesting 'they should dance or sing,' and telling them his stock anecdote about the lady in whom he had discovered, though it was unknown to her before, a vast and, as it proved, a productive talent.

He made love to Lucilla in his own way—that is to say, the way in which he mentally regarded all her sex; an undraped way, to express it in the least objectionable manner. It was not so much what he said or did, but what he looked and implied, that brought the constant blushes to her cheek and the feeling of discomfort and painful shyness to her mind. He talked of the show he was projecting, but he talked of it relatively. He continually stopped in his narrative to ask her if she could do this or that, or if she had ever felt like this or that, and the feelings he asked for were those she had never experienced, or, if she had, would have shrunk from expressing.

When she went in with him to supper, he

pressed her to make an appointment to meet him somewhere that he might talk over to her the plan for his forthcoming entertainment, and discuss the prospect of getting up one with her. He suggested his chambers, but an instinct, not an education—for that Lucilla lacked—made her demur to this. Still, the prospect of a *tête-à-tête*, of many a *tête-à-tête*, with her was too precious to be lightly forsaken. He pressed her again and again for an appointment, until the girl said she would consult Nettie.

He took the task out of her hands. Nettie and he were fairly good friends, although he had never been her lover. With all his peculiarities, he knew enough of the world to understand by Nettie's reply that the field was open to him. Thanks to Sinclair Furley, Nettie had enjoyed her evening untrammelled by the care of the girl. Sinclair Furley might continue to free her from a companionship that she looked upon as an espionage, and an irritation that, since she had surprised Mordaunt Rivers with the girl, had been redoubled. Nettie's fading charms accentuated her appreciation of Lucilla's youthful fairness; and Nettie feared greatly that when the child had caught up the manners and tone of the set she might have to brook a rival near her tottering throne. No man

could have a worse character than Sinclair Furley. It was a well-known fact that his conversation was even less decent in private than in public ; that his company was impossible to a woman who respected herself ; but what mattered that to Nettie ? Lucilla must manage to take care of herself.

An appointment was made for the morrow. Lucy went home full of the sense that her long *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Furley would be the precursor of many others ; that he valued her opinion, and wanted it for his new play ; that he thought her clever, and believed she could also dance and sing if he put her in the way of it. And the girl felt happier that night in the thought that she might possess these talents, and that through them there might be a door opened to her into a wider world. The hope, inter-penetrating her dreams, made her think of Sinclair. It was he who would lead her into this lighter atmosphere. She would try and put away from her mind that feeling of repulsion that she could neither account for nor overcome. It is certain that more than three-fourths of what he said and what he implied had been utterly uncomprehended by her.

But she did not sleep well that night. Something there was about Sinclair, a feebleness mental,

moral, or physical, that reminded her of Marius. She tossed restlessly about, dreaming now of one, now of another. They were changing figures. Was it his hands—soft, boneless, the fat flesh covering the roots of the nails—that reminded her of those others, heavy and cold and uncertain? She roused herself from her sleep. Some other hands had held hers; some other touch had been about her. She was under the charm again of smiling eyes and smiling mouth, and a man's dominant nature. She smiled in the darkness her response, then the girl-child turned on her pillow with that happy smile, and the god that tempts maidens soothed her in his arms with brighter morning dreams, where Mordaunt Rivers took Sinclair's place, and Marius faded into unreality.

CHAPTER X.

PUNCTUALLY Sinclair kept his appointment, arriving with a big bundle of MSS. tied up in brown paper. Nettie was in the drawing-room at the moment with Lady Lusher. She welcomed him warmly, soon, however, dismissing him to the inner room where Lucilla awaited him. A significant look answered Lady Lusher's interrogatory raising of her eyebrows.

‘What, does she like him? How filthy!’

‘Oh, girls are all the same,’ answered Nettie lightly. ‘I thought they might just as well meet here as anywhere “on the tiles ;”’ she laughed the laugh that Mordaunt hated. ‘Rolly is so particular about her.’

‘But I thought Sinclair Furley was such a——’

‘Oh, Rolly has a very high opinion of him. I think he's a — well ; but what's that to me?’

This was not one of Nettie's good days ; she looked haggard and old ; her glass told her how

unfavourably she compared with the girl. Though she was no longer jealous of her influence with Rolly, she could not put out of her mind Mordaunt's interrupted kiss. Nettie's jealousy was wide and inclusive.

She left Sinclair with Lucilla this afternoon, while she and Lady Lusher compared their experiences; talked of sin in various forms, but from their own standpoint—a standpoint wherefrom sin was sin no longer, but a more or less amusing pastime. The men who dropped in were not invited to penetrate the inner sanctum. Sinclair was left alone to pour into the ears of his listener whatsoever of his eloquence he thought fit.

‘At last—this is delightful,’ commenced Sinclair, waving his white hands, ‘to talk over one’s works to a sympathetic listener, and that listener you! Can one imagine a more charming circumstance?’

Lucilla blushed with pleasure.

‘Shall I begin? or shall I first explain my motive—my idea that I have worked upon?’

‘Is it a play?’

‘Hardly; it is a monologue—but there is a great deal in it. You will be astonished. I will explain it to you.’

‘Will it not explain itself?’ She was more at her ease with him this afternoon; his absorption in

himself and his work drew his attention off her personality; the atmosphere about her was purer in this withdrawal, and she had space in which to be natural.

‘Don’t, don’t speak like that,’ he interrupted with a pained intonation; ‘it is Philistine—terribly Philistine. I could not have believed it of you.’

Lucilla felt ashamed, although she knew not wherein she had erred, or in what her Philistinism had consisted.

‘I am sorry,’ she faltered, and looked at him wistfully out of her eyes that had begun to have that shrinking look in them as of an animal that knows not when the ready blow will fall. Marius’s image, Rolly’s neglect, Nettie’s ill-concealed dislike, had had their effect. Her nerves were always quivering; her distrust of herself and her fears poisoning her every moment.

‘You can’t help it; it is not your fault. Roland is thoroughly Philistine; but you must not listen to him if I am to teach you art. *Footlights* is not art; nor commonplace stories, with plots, the aim of the dramatist. If you will listen to me I will teach you; but you must give yourself up to me, and believe in me: it is the first essential.’

Sinclair Furley was the most egotistical man in

the world. He forgot to make love to Lucilla while he talked to her of himself. And she, she sat and listened; it was not often anyone talked to her. He thought more of the effect of his work than of the work itself. His mental uncleanness exhibited itself constantly—he did not drink, he had an incurable timidity that prevented him indulging in other forms of vice—singing and acting were the outlets for his weakness.

He was vain. In his emasculate, feminine fashion he had fallen in love with Lucilla. His soul was narrow, but it had recognised a difference between the girl and the other women with whom he was brought into contact. Still, he forgot he was in love with her while he talked of himself and of his work.

He talked for hours. Lucilla's brain grew weary, and ceased to understand. The daylight waned, the tea grew cold, the hum of voices in the other room ceased, but still he talked on.

At length the quiet in the next room and the growing darkness recalled him. The MSS. had never been opened—the explanations had taken up all the time. He was profuse in his apologies and regrets. He 'hoped he had not bored her,' but did not fear it, and, while uttering his farewells,

promised to come in at the same time to-morrow and teach her how she was to begin to dance.

At length she heard the door close after him. She was again alone, and in a solitude that was cheerless and cold. Beyond her was the empty room, with its disarranged chairs and cushions, the ends of cigars, the burnt-out ashes of cigarettes, and half-empty tumblers lying about in confusion. Nettie had gone up to dress for the evening when her friends had left her. The servant had brought in no lights. The May evening was chilly and damp. Lucilla was mentally exhausted. Sinclair had talked art to her ; he had preached the creed of Zolaism, and had applied it to the stage ; she had striven to understand the technicalities of his exordium ; he had said things that had made her heart beat fast and her cheek flush red. But the strain of listening for so long had over-tired her ; she was benumbed by it ; her own voice would have sounded strange and distant to her ears. And the empty room, with its traces of a genial party, depressed her. The long evening before her seemed miserable in contemplation. She wandered through the rooms, into the dining-room, and looked out on the black trees of the square, grim and unstirred in the still evening. The streets

were empty, but across the way she could see the lights in the windows—could almost hear the sound of merry childish voices. Her eyes filled with tears ; a curious, sad self-pity seized upon her, and the tears fell down her cheeks. She was so lonely, so neglected, in that deserted room.

And so Mordaunt Rivers found her in the semi-dusk. He walked in unannounced in regular Southampton Row manner. He had almost forgotten her—almost, but not quite.

‘What, all alone, and in the dark? How’s that?’

‘Nettie and father have gone out,’ she faltered, as she gave him her hand ; her eyes were cast down—she did not wish that he should see her tears.

‘That is no reason the lamps should not be lit, you baby!’ he answered lightly, and, taking a match from his pocket, he lit the red-shaded lamp that was nearest him.

The lamplight fell on the girl’s pale, troubled face ; he could see the tear-traces on her cheeks.

‘Why, child, you have been crying!’ His tone was so gentle, there was such a thrill of pity in it, that Lucilla gave way ; she sank on the sofa and hid her face in her hands.

He sat down beside her ; he put his arms about her and drew her gently to him. After all, she was only a child, and as a child he could comfort her in her present trouble. And Lucilla wept in his arms a little ; then the paroxysm of sobs passed ; she made a movement to withdraw—he did not loose her. She looked up timidly, her lips tremulous, her eyes humid ; the red light of the lamp deepened the yellow of her hair.

‘Keep still, child ; you are safe here.’ His eyes smiled down upon her ; the arms that held her were not nervous and loose as Rolly’s were, nor heavy and close as Marius’s had been. Mordaunt held her firmly, her fair head resting on his broad shoulder ; a quiet strength looked out of his calm face ; the breath that fanned her was not drink-laden as Rolly’s, the teeth not jagged and irregular like Marius’s. She could rest there with a pleasure that was physical, for the eyes that could see no beauty in Whistler’s pictures could see plenty in the well-cut features and brown beard above her. ‘What have you been doing with yourself this afternoon to make you look like this?’ With his even-shaped brown hand he touched her still wet cheeks. They reddened under the touch.

‘Mr. Furley has been here,’ she said hurriedly.

The figure he held was so childish, her face was so pretty in its delicacy, that a thrill of disgust ran through him as he thought of the comedian; he imagined how he would besmear her with his dirty descriptions, and gloat over her charms with his unmanly floridity.

It smote him afresh—that sense of her unfitness for Southampton Row. He released her suddenly; he walked over to the window.

‘And is he coming again?’

‘Yes, he is coming often. Nettie asked him,’ she answered nervously.

Mordaunt looked around him. In the gathering gloom, relieved by the one lamp, the dirt and untidiness seemed accentuated by the presence of the lonely girl. The acrid atmosphere was permeated with smoke and dust and heavy scents, and the single human thing was but the product of all this impure atmosphere, born in it, from it taking ever fresh draughts of the impurities in which her being had had its rise.

Abruptly, impulsively, he said:

‘Come out; you can’t spend the evening alone here. Get your things, and come out with me.’

‘Me?’ she flushed.

‘Yes, you. What were you going to do with yourself?’ he repeated.

‘They will bring me more tea presently ; then I shall go to bed.’

‘Cheerful!’ He shuddered. ‘Is that what you do every evening when they go out?’

‘Yes.’

‘And do you sleep when you go to bed at nine o’clock, after a solitary evening?’

She hesitated.

‘You lie awake?’

‘Yes.’

‘And read?’

‘No ; I think.’

‘What of?’

He looked at her with fresh interest. She broke down again, weeping, and telling him through her sobs that she thought of Marius ; and of her father, who did not love her ; and of her life, that promised to be so empty and so dreary.

He put his arm around her again : how else can one comfort a child ? And she, feeling less lonely now protected, made no protest. Mor-daunt’s heart swelled with pity ; he grew hot with anger against Rolly. How long was it since he had held in his arms a young creature like this,

or had he ever so held? He stooped his head down, and for an instant his lips rested on her hair—her soft, fair hair, innocent of wash or dye.

‘Poor little girl! poor little neglected girl!’ he said.

Her sobs ceased.

Now here was he, a man of five-and-thirty, and there was she, a girl of seventeen, alone in the gathering dusk; the man’s heart throbbing with pity and sympathy, the girl’s beating fast with the pleasure of being pitied, of being so comforted.

But it was Southampton Row—Southampton Row, where Mordaunt had drunk and revelled, and seen frail women, and joined in orgies. Of course he felt Lucilla was not as they were; of course he recognised in her that subtle aroma of maidenhood that told him the innocence of her acceptance of his caresses, her child-like gratitude that she had found a friend.

He looked round the rooms again; they struck him as if in them was concentrated the essence of all he had seen pass there. That dent in the mantelpiece that Lord Lusher had made when he had fought with Charlie, that big stain on the

carpet where Tom in drunken glee had poured out a libation to the gods they were worshipping ; Nettie's powder-box and hand-mirror.

‘Come out,’ he said abruptly ; ‘no wonder you get hipped, sitting alone here ; it is enough to give anyone the blues. Put your things on, and come out with me for a change ; it will do you good.’

Lucilla sat up.

‘Come out—now—with you?’

‘Yes ; why not ? We will have a little dinner together, then we will go to the theatre. You’ve no idea how a little change freshens one up, and makes things look brighter all round.’

No idea had been further from his thoughts when he had come into the house, but now it seized upon him. It would be doing the girl a kindness, poor little thing ! He could not spend the evening alone with her in these haunted rooms, yet he did not like to leave her alone. Poor little girl ; poor little, pretty little girl !

He grew quite eager to carry out his idea, driving away Lucilla's scruples one by one, and using in turn authority and endearments before he succeeded.

‘What will father say?’ she protested, somewhat feebly.

‘Father won’t know anything about it; he won’t be home until half-past twelve, whereas we shall get in long before that. Now, run away and dress, there is a good little girl; make yourself look very pretty, and don’t keep me waiting very long, because I am getting hungry.’

Lucilla still hesitated, but Mordaunt opened the door for her, and she was longing to go. An evening quite alone seemed worse than ever to her, now that she had a prospect of one so differently spent. She ran upstairs to dress, banishing all scruples, and very soon the servant, whom she had rung for, came to her assistance.

Rivers had sent her, having settled matters liberally downstairs, on the basis of the understanding that the going out was to remain a secret.

Lucilla dressed with more real expectation of pleasure than she had ever felt before. The image of Rivers, that had been in her mind a week or two since, and that had been driven out by Sinclair Furley and the hopes he had held out to her, reasserted itself. He pitied her, he sym-

pathized with her ; how firm was his touch, how clear his outlines !

As she dressed, the life she was going to carve out for herself on the stage, with Sinclair Furley's aid, faded. She was excited, pleased, happy in the thought of the evening she was going to spend, of the kind words she would hear. She felt acutely the reaction from the depression she was suffering under when Mr. Rivers had just come. Nothing more ; her sex was still dormant.

Lucilla must be forgiven her imprudence in accepting so readily Rivers's invitation, when it is remembered that propriety was a word she had never heard, a course of action in her adult life she had never seen. If she felt a twinge of conscience, it was merely because it seemed to her she was deceiving her father in going without his permission, although it was deceit of the class she had heard talked over and laughed at as a joke, at least a score of times.

She put on the new gray and white dress that she had had made for the party at McDougal's, and she appeared before Mordaunt, already a little regretting his invitation, so shy and blushing, so thoroughly pretty, that he cast off his regrets and

fears, and set himself seriously to the task of 'having a good time.'

He chaffed her, and he patted her, exactly in the manner one treats a child ; and under the influence of his gay talk she lost her shyness and became, for the time being, what Nature had intended her for, but what she had never been, joyous and light-hearted.

Rivers drew her out, played with her, one might almost say, without arousing in her any self-consciousness or remembrance of her sex, or of his own. He brought her back again to the state she had been in before her father's obvious boredom and Nettie's obvious dislike had driven her back into herself, and shut up all outlet for her youth to grow joyous in, after the repression of her life with Marius.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT Mordaunt Rivers's intentions or ideas were as regards Lucilla is problematic: circumstances shaped his after-conduct. She was very pretty, and she lived in the same atmosphere with such women as Nettie, as Lady Lusher, as Jenny Farrell. She touched him in a way he had never before been touched. He felt sorry for her to an extent that interfered with his enjoyment of all things.

In going to Southampton Row this evening he had had no intention of taking the girl out. Habit and idleness had taken him there. Idleness that was habitual to this man, who had no ambition beyond his daily bread. All Rolly's vices, his drunken habits, his unfaithfulness, his moral weakness, Mordaunt knew by heart. He despised Rolly bitterly, but he had a certain liking for him, recognising that he never meant to do any harm, but only allowed himself to be swayed

by every passing impulse. He did not want to hurt Rolly through his daughter; he merely wanted to be kind to this babe strayed into Bohemia.

Her prettiness—and she was, and always remained, even in the bad days that came to her, very pretty—scarcely appealed to him so much as did her incongruity in emerging from childhood in such an atmosphere. Sinclair Furley's picturesque phrase that she was 'distinctively virginal' made her live for him in a light such as he had never before regarded women.

'Are you happy, child?' he asked, and took her hand, as they drove home that night in the cab.

The glow on her pale cheeks and in her blue eyes answered him.

'I have never spent so happy an evening,' she answered fervently, squeezing the hand of his that imprisoned hers; 'it was all lovely—the dinner, and the theatre, and the unexpectedness, and everything.'

'Including my company?' he asked.

'It would have been nothing without you,' she replied enthusiastically, genuinely. 'I don't know why you are so good to me.'

'It is because you are pretty.'

She blushed in the darkness.

‘Don’t laugh at me; I am not pretty.’

‘How do you know?’

‘Because,’ and her voice sank and her cheeks paled again, ‘I am like Marius.’ A dimness came over her as she said it, and a fear. She held him with both hands. ‘Like me, but like me for something else. Go on being good to me. I am so lonely.’

Her eyes filled with tears.

Rolly had once been touched by an appeal from Lucilla, and had vowed to be good to her—both to himself and to her. But Rolly was like the sand-heaps the children build upon the beach—a fresh tide comes, and all traces of their efforts are washed away. Mordaunt was different; the cling of her small hands, and the fear he saw with the appeal in her eyes, touched a tender place in his heart, whose existence was unknown to him. He had no words to answer her. He took both her hands in his, and held them a moment.

‘God help you,’ he said—and there was a break in his voice—‘if you’ve no better friend than I to turn to!’

‘I don’t want anyone better,’ she answered feverishly. ‘Be my friend always; be the same

every day. Don't be like father'—her voice dropped—'kind one day, but hardly seeing me the next. Don't be like Nettie, so that when you are kind I am afraid, or say things to me that hurt me right through here.' She put her hand to her head. 'Be always like you have been to-night.'

'Very well,' he said as lightly as he could; 'we will vow a compact of friendship so perfect that nothing can undo it, nothing shake it. But now jump out; here we are, and, fortunately, the dining-room gas is still low, and Rolly and Nettie still out.'

'I wish I might tell father I had been.'

'No, no,' he said hurriedly; 'we will keep our friendship a secret. Go to bed and sleep well; don't lie awake thinking.'

He held out his hand to her. They shook hands. He did not ask for a kiss. The omission seemed strange to her. Had he kissed her then, it would not have awoken her. She would have given him a child's kiss of gratitude and affection. But he did not kiss her, for her appeal to him for kindness had touched him, and he meant to be kind, nothing more, to this pretty child who had attracted him.

So they parted that night, before half-past

eleven, after an evening spent in dining in the public room at Verrey's and in sitting out 'The Private Secretary' afterwards.

They had talked, though not much. He had assumed toward her a paternal manner; telling her what to eat and what not to eat; pointing out to her the peculiarities of the other people, and making fun of them for her benefit; helping her in and out of the cab, on and off with her cloak; petting her, and playing with her as one does with a child.

'Rum go!' said the footman to the cook, as the pair parted at the door. 'Wonder what the missus would say if she knew?'

'Well, she won't give you nothing for telling her, and he will give you something for not telling her; so it's easy to see which side your bread's buttered,' answered his confidante. And, needless to add, Nettie was not informed.

Mordaunt's conscience, as he walked down the empty street into the dreariness of Russell Square, reminded him of its existence. He puffed away at his cigarette, but he did not obscure the face of Lucilla as she had thanked him, as she had said, with that innocent burst of gratitude, 'I don't know why you are so good to me.'

She was fair, she was young, she was pretty. She was Nettie's step-daughter, and he had himself foreshadowed to Nettie her inevitable future. But then he had not known her ; it had not dawned upon him that the girl was not as other girls, or that if she were, then he did not after all understand 'other girls.'

'How joyous, how childlike, how light-hearted . . . what an infernal thing it is. . . .' He got thus far in his meditations and stopped. 'Bah ! it was nothing to him. He had done her no harm ; she was dull and lonely, and he had taken her out and cheered her up.'

The code of manners for young ladies was not strict in the world he lived in now ; not the same code that had governed another world he had known years and years ago. Nettie would be in a fury if she heard ; but that not on account of Lucilla's having gone out at night without a chaperone, but only at the fact that her companion was himself.

Nettie was of a very jealous disposition, and he was careful not to arouse it. But that did not prevent him, now that the ice was once broken, from showing Lucilla every kindness that was in his power. He got into the habit of meeting her

on the staircase, in the hall, as he came in and out of the house, and of making appointments with her.

Just now he was fairly safe, for Nettie was very much absorbed in her flirtation with Antonelli. Nettie's youth was vanishing so fast that an *affaire* gave her double pleasure. She dressed herself three and four times a day ; she practised upon him all those arts that were growing rusty for lack of use. Sinclair Furley came every day to sing or talk to Lucilla, though the dancing lessons had not yet begun, and Nettie felt satisfied that if the girl had a lover, and that lover Sinclair Furley, she need take no further trouble in the matter.

So every afternoon Sinclair talked and sang to Lucilla, and the girl sat and listened ; or, at least, she sat silent, and Sinclair thought she listened. But she could not listen always ; harmlessly his insinuations, his innuendos, his slimy words and slimy looks passed over her. She could not help drifting into happy reveries. His voice hummed in her ears monotonously ; he had an even and monotonous intonation with mechanical rises, and falls rhythmic but unimpressive. The humming did not interrupt her dreams. She had dreamt all her life—of the father who

would one day love her and seek her companionship ; of Marius ; of Nettie ; but now only of Mordaunt, the physical dignity and beauty of whose manhood impressed her.

Marius and Rolly sank into the background. The girl grew stronger in health and nerves under the influence of happiness. It was happiness for her to see Mordaunt, to feel that his friendship was really hers. She had none of the uncertainty, the hopes and fears of love unacknowledged, whether returned or unreturned.

Mordaunt was always gentle with her ignorance : he talked to her when he had the opportunity, and taught her in the talking many things she was wishful to learn. He was well read himself. There had been a time in his life when reading had been his only solace. He enlarged her mind ; he taught her the existence of literature. Not the only literature Sinclair Furley knew, of De Goncourt and Daudet ; but something of the beauties of Horace, something of the philosophy of Plato. He taught her history — not the history of a young lady educated at a high school, with the small store of facts carefully packed handy for an examiner to get at—but he gave her a broad survey of social history, and

pointed out to her recurrent thought-waves, art cycles, the varying features of a shifting humanity.

He found many opportunities. Nettie was absorbed in Antonelli. Rolly, just now, had a feverish infatuation for Tessie Gay that kept him much from home. Mordaunt knew always their movements, and neither his contributions, nor his editorship of *Footlights*, prevented him taking advantage of every occasion that their absence gave him, of giving Lucilla a little treat.

‘You don’t want to come with us to the Empire,’ Nettie would say; ‘you can ask Sinclair Furley to come in the evening instead of in the afternoon. The Empire is not the proper place for girls.’

And Lucilla would acquiesce—acquiesce while the colour came into her cheek, and her heart beat fast; but Sinclair Furley never got his invitation.

‘DEAR MR. RIVERS,

‘Nettie is going to the Empire to-night.

‘Yours truly,

‘LUCILLA LEWESHAM.’

Mordaunt would get this little letter at his

club, or at his chambers, and he would smile under his moustache, 'Poor little thing! Where shall I take her to-night? Let me see, we have been to the Court, and the Lyceum, and the Strand. It is very hot for the theatre . . . I'll take her to the Exhibition . . . good idea!'

'DEAR LITTLE GIRL,

'Go to bed with a headache. It will be too late if you wait until Nettie has gone out. Be at the corner a quarter to eight, sharp. I've got a splendid idea for this evening. Not evening dress—hat and jacket.

'Yours,

'M. R.'

The footman was their sworn friend now. Lucilla got the note just before Sinclair arrived for the afternoon reading.

Poor man; his chance of a hearing was a slender one, but he noticed nothing. He had a passion for the sound of his own voice; singing to Lucilla had become a religion with him. He fully intended to teach her to dance; in the meantime it would educate her to hear the *motif* of the play; to thoroughly master his music, to enter into the spirit of the thing. His egotism was gratified

by her attention, his self-love soothed by the chaff he underwent from his friends at his intimacy with Rolly's daughter. There was nothing he did not imply that took place in those afternoon interviews. He had a habit of interpolating French phrases into his conversation, although his French was not so perfect as he imagined. He talked much, and mysteriously, of his 'bonnes fortunes' with the girl, and the whole incident gave him keen pleasure.

He did not notice this afternoon how far off were Lucilla's thoughts. He read and read and read, while she dreamed over the pleasures of the evening, and wondered again and again what treat her dear friend had in store for her.

'I have been so impatient,' she said, when, a little out of breath, in her excitement and hurry, she joined him at the appointed time.

'Have you?' he answered lightly. 'What a baby you are! Where do you think I mean to take you—guess?'

'I don't know—I don't care much; it is sure to be somewhere nice.'

She nestled closer to him in the hansom, and slipped her hand into his.

Lucilla was unconscious of her sin against conventionality : conventionality was an unknown quantity to her. She had wondered why Mor-daunt had not kissed her that first evening they had been out together ; but in all their subsequent jaunts she had omitted to put up her face in the child-like way that she had done then. Beyond that, and a certain confidence in him, her feelings toward him were much the same as, or but little different from, those she possessed for her father.

She would hold his hand, she would press up against him in a caressing way. She would even talk to him of her fondness for him. She would encourage herself to dream of him, chiefly because his masculine figure in its strength and vigour overpowered and shut out the dreaded one of Marius.

CHAPTER XII.

‘WHERE are we going?’

‘Can’t you restrain your impatience until we get there?’ he answered teasingly.

‘No, no; tell me.’

‘Well, we are going a little trip to Fairyland.’

‘Will there be fairies?’

‘Yes; great big handsome men-fairies. I shall be put in the background there, I suppose.’

She laughed a merry little laugh.

‘You are not afraid?’

He turned and looked at her.

‘Yes, I am. Babies are so fickle. Supposing a big fairy with a yellow moustache wanted to take you out of an evening, wouldn’t you be very delighted, and give me the slip as easily as possible?’

‘No,’ she answered lightly. ‘I don’t like yellow moustaches like Lord Lusher’s, nor black ones like Tom Furley’s—nor none at all, like Sinclair Furley.’

‘Well, what do you like? Describe the ideal.’

She glanced at him slyly under her lashes.

‘Beards,’ she answered laconically.

‘You don’t know how they feel, baby.’ He smoothed his with his brown hand. ‘They are rough; you had a chance once; you threw it away. Now you will never, never know.’

He shook his head at her.

She blushed, for she remembered that she had felt it; that before Nettie had surprised them, her cheeks had grown hot under the touch of it.

‘I don’t want to,’ she said defiantly. ‘If I do, I can touch the broom—there!’

‘Very improper!’ he said coolly. ‘If I catch you with the broom, I shall complain to your father of you.’

In such idle chatter they reached the Exhibition. It was the year of the Inventories. Mordaunt wasted no time on the exhibits. He led Lucilla straight into the grounds, where the illuminated fountains and the many-coloured lamps, all brilliant in the warm summer night, elicited from the girl divers exclamations of pleasure.

They dined at a special little table, by the window; the fresh air played about them as they ate, and the strains of the music mingled with

their conversation. Theirs was a charming intimacy. Mordaunt put away from him deliberately all thought but that of the pleasure of the moment. And the pleasure to him was immense. The girl's prettiness, her childishness, her evident unconcealed feeling of friendship for him, was a revelation to him.

This evening, for instance, he encouraged her to talk of nothing else. Wandering under the trees, within sound of the music, hand-in-hand for the most part, he encouraged her to talk of her feelings towards him. Lucilla was nothing loth. She was in that delightful stage which precedes love in a young girl's mind. No touch or taint of passion marred her thoughts, yet her mind was as full of Mordaunt Rivers's physical attributes as of his mental ones. He had wiped out Marius and her father and Sinclair Furley. He had restored to her in some indefinable way her lost childhood. She was in a state of constant pleasurable expectation of, and in, and about him. He imported, into the life that had been in danger of growing gray and colourless from neglect, a warmth and a brightness.

'But why do you like me so much, child?' he asked her.

‘I like you because you are kind to me ; because you take me out ; because your hands are not too warm or too soft ’—she pressed one between her small ones—‘ but just firm and nice. I like to think about you, and I can always see you when you are not there, and then I don’t see anything else. You come between me and everything I don’t want to see or think of. I used to be always thinking about Marius, or about my life, and that it was no use to anybody, and I was not wanted ; but now—now I only think of when will be the next time you will take me out ; and so I have always something to look forward to.’

It was very artless and very simple. Mordaunt smoked on in silence a moment or two.

‘ But I suppose if Furley had had the idea of relieving the monotony of your evenings by taking you out, you would have felt just the same for him.’

She shook her head, with its fair short curls, looking at him out of the blue eyes softly.

‘ No, you are not like he is. He startles me sometimes—frightens me. I do not know what he is going to say ; I am afraid of what he is going to say. I don’t know why. With you I always feel safe and happy.’

He turned suddenly round.

‘You feel safe with me?’ he asked her almost roughly.

For answer she came closer to him, and, laughing low, answered:

‘Quite safe.’

He took her two hands in his, and looked into her eyes. No blush, no tremor, no invitation; but candid and open, if affectionately, her eyes met his.

‘And yet—and yet,’ he said, ‘you are not so safe with me but what——’

He was looking at her so intently, he was holding her hands so tight, that she grew nervous. She tried to get free, but he held her tight.

‘Don’t! You are hurting me!’ she cried.

He loosed her.

‘I would not hurt you, child.’

His voice was unsteady.

He talked little more to her that evening. He took her home very soon. Mordaunt Rivers had never led a chaste life or a temperate one. He had lived since his early manhood in a vicious atmosphere, and had never gone out of his way to avoid temptation. But he began to feel that Lucilla was a temptation to him, and what was higher in

him than his body revolted at it. Neither Lucilla's childishness nor her affectionate trust in him could prevent him from seeing the budding charms of her immaturity ; could prevent pity and liking and interest from becoming something warmer at times, when, in her absolute unconsciousness, she tempted him by her caressing ways.

But there was a moral strength in Mordaunt ; and his manliness was not only in his appearance. He went home that evening, and he vowed to himself that the girl should come to no harm through him. That he would take for himself the pleasure of her blossoming, of her pretty, loving ways, of her pleasures in pleasant things—but that he would take no more from her. Her lips should be sacred from him ; the heart that he could tell would be his for the asking he would not take ; the bloom of her innocence he would not rub off. And believing in his strength and ability to keep his vow, he made no effort to put the temptation from him. Quite the contrary.

The Cormorant Club lost its charm for him, the weekly house-dinner bored him, the Sunday evening boxing-matches he found brutal and coarse ; but, above all things, there arose in his heart a bitter distaste for Nettie and Roland ;

for their respective vices and mutual toleration. He saw Rolly, of an evening, excited, semi-intoxicated, lounging at music-hall bars, until it was Tessie Gay's turn to sing ; heard him vehemently and noticeably applauding, or flinging bouquets ; watched the vulgar little beauty in her loud encouragement of him. Their coarse love-making — if love-making it can be called — revolted his taste, and he could not join in the laughter and chaff around him.

From the music-hall he would repair to Southampton Row. On the evenings she had no appointment with him, Lucilla would retire early to her happy dreams. He would find the heavy atmosphere of the house doubly repellant, when Nettie was lounging in her liberal evening dress, with Antonelli, coarse-lipped, heavy jowled, making hot love to her with his affectedly foreign floridity.

Nettie and Rolly, and the Southampton Row clique, became abhorrent to him. Under his distaste for the whole set, his copy for *Footlights* languished and grew dull ; it was well for the future of the paper that it was firmly established as a popular favourite. Mordaunt began to hate his work and his surroundings, and his easy-going

Bohemian bar-loafing life, that had satisfied him so many years.

He was in this frame of mind when the 2nd of July dawned—a day Lucilla had been looking forward to for weeks. It was the day of Henley Regatta. Lord Lusher had a house-boat, and the theatrical party he had invited was wide enough in its scope to include both Nettie and Antonelli, Rolly and Tessie Gay. Nettie had arranged to stay down the two days, to act as joint hostess. Mordaunt had thought it a good opportunity for another treat for Lucilla; and so curiously altered was he, that treats for Lucilla seemed gradually to become the whole object of his existence.

Nettie, Rolly and party left Paddington by the 11.30 train; they left Southampton Row at 10.45. At 11, Mordaunt, neatly attired in a light boating costume, drove up in a hansom, and found Lucilla, already dressed in her white flannel dress and sailor hat, awaiting him in the hall.

‘That’s right, child; jump in,’ he said, assisting her. ‘We have twelve minutes to get to Waterloo, and no time to spare. How nice you look! Are we not going to have a lovely day?’

‘Lovely! Isn’t it all delicious? I want to be

on the river all day long. You know I never saw the river, except that day at Richmond, and then I quite longed to go for a row.'

'Why did not you tell me? I would have managed it.'

'Oh, you are always managing things for me, but this is better still. A whole long day, and such a day, on the river, just you and me. It makes me feel so happy ; I do not know what to do, or how to thank you.'

'Do you know, baby, you tempt me so much with that constant "I don't know how to thank you" of yours, that one of these days I shall tell you.'

She looked at him affectionately and squeezed his hand.

'Do ; I wish you would. Oh, here we are ; don't tell me now, but get the tickets. I would not miss the train for worlds.'

'Plenty of time, plenty of time—three minutes to spare. Don't jump out of the cab before me in your excitement, or one of these days you'll fall over, and then what shall I do?'

But she was too excited to heed him, and did not quiet down until they were actually in the train, with their tickets to Halliford safely in

their pockets. This had been Mordaunt's brilliant idea. He had often wanted to take Lucy for a day on the river, but an opportunity had been very difficult to find ; for it is one of those enjoyments particularly relished by the theatrical world, and there never was a certainty on a fine day that Roland would not be starting off unexpectedly with this or that person for a jaunt, and his destination, decided at the last moment, would be difficult to discover. But while Rolly was at Henley, Lucy and Mordaunt would be safe at Halliford ; and to Halliford, accordingly, on this sweet sunny July morning, went the happy girl with her hero.

There are some people on whom the country has a peculiar effect ; an intoxication, a delight is experienced by them the very instant the city is left behind, the sweet-scented air blows in their faces ; their eyes, wearied with the confinement of houses, roam over fields, and through trees. And Lucilla was one of them. From the moment she alighted at the little country station, and smelt the fresh air, and saw the greenness, she became intoxicated with the pure delight of it. She could barely talk, though she put her hand in Mordaunt's, when they took a fly down to the river,

and turned her swimming eyes to him for sympathy every now and then, when some scent, sweeter than another, or some magnolia-grown cottage, or garden full of big, scented lilies, drew from her a long breath, that was almost a sigh of ecstatic pleasure. Her happiness was far beyond all speech ; she could only look around her, drawing in long breaths of the country, as Mordaunt saw, devouring it also with her eyes.

Mordaunt had taken the precaution to order a boat to be in readiness—a brightly-decorated Canadian canoe—and he arranged the cushions comfortably for her, and showed her how she was to sit in the middle, so as to balance the little craft ; and then, divesting himself of coat and waistcoat, and round hat, he seated himself opposite her, and soon pulled her away from the shore.

They had never passed so happy a day ; it may be doubted whether they ever again passed one so absolutely free from care or thought for the morrow. Mordaunt had provided himself with a small picnic-basket ; they lunched together on a little island in mid-stream ; Lucilla doing the unpacking and arranging, Mordaunt the subsequent washing-up. Then they got into the

boat again, but mooring it to a tree, he stretched himself out on the cushion beside her, and began to talk.

There was not a cloud in the sky ; the sun was shaded from them by the trees, but its beautiful warmth, tempered by the gentlest of summer breezes, touched them both.

‘So you are happy?’ he said, as they lay there together, the smallness of the boat bringing them so close that their shoulders touched.

‘I am too happy to talk.’

Her eyes were glistening. She had taken off her hat, and the fair, curly tendrils of her hair waved over the blue veins of her forehead ; the sun showed the white down on her cheeks, and it kissed them into a warmer hue than was their wont.

He felt a glow of pleasure in merely watching her. Such an innocent, beautiful happiness, aroused simply by a motherless child recognising for the first time, and being moved by, the wonderful motherliness of Nature ! Mordaunt could see he was forgotten ; her eyes were filled with the lapping waters, sun-streaked and still, her ears with the soughing of the leafy trees and the carolling of birds.

He pressed the small white hand that lay idle

between his two muscular brown ones, and said nothing. They lay there for more than an hour absolutely silent, and Mordaunt, speculating no longer as to his future, forgetting his worldly wisdom, his cynicism, the world he lived in, abandoned himself to the enjoyment of noting her rapt face, or trying to follow the direction of her reverie by her changing expression.

He drifted into thoughtfulness. Her voice aroused him.

‘It is making me too sad. I want to talk—I want to get it out of my mind.’

‘What?’

He was scarcely awake.

‘All of it. I feel that I am trying to get closer to it, but I cannot. Nature is so beautiful, but it is so far off. I am empty of it, hungry for it, and I cannot satisfy myself. It is my mother, but it is dead, and I can feel the beauty of such motherhood, but can only pray to her. I cannot throw myself into her arms. I am alone in the midst of it—in the midst of everything!’ There was a sob in her voice; she was trembling with the excitement of the emotion that she could not put in words. ‘I can’t explain to you what I feel.’

Rivers put his arm around her, and drew her closer to him, protectingly, soothingly. She did not resist, although until now there had been little embracing in their intercourse.

‘ Explain it to me.’

So Rivers, the world-worn cynic, who edited *Footlights*, was called upon to explain to the dawning maidenhood of this child the spiritual mystery of her sensations. And the peaceful spirit of the country being upon him also, together with a growing feeling for the girl, he was able to acquit himself of the task.

It was the fulness of love and the novelty of it, he told her. It was only love she felt, but she had no words to express it. She was dumb to express her love of Nature, because love—the passion of love such as Nature sometimes inspires—was strange and new to her.

What wonder, seeing her swimming eyes looking up to him with such childlike confidence, that he would comfort her, and save her from that ache at the heart that her silent yearning had begun to give her? What wonder that he forgot his vows, that he drifted away from love of Nature to love of man, from love general to love particular? They talked of love, and the child noted

the gold thread the sun painted into his brown hair, the depth it added to his kindly blue eyes. She felt a thrill when his strong arm drew her closer to his side—when at length the bearded lips touched hers gently.

He asked her no questions. She scarcely knew whether it was love of Mordaunt or love of the country that agitated and excited her so. The two became commingled in her mind during the rest of the afternoon, which they spent until the sun went down resting under the trees, talking little, thinking of each other to the accompaniment of the gently lapping waters.

Mordaunt abandoned himself to the feelings of the hour. A child was with him—so near that by a word he could break the spell that bound her to childhood, and see the dawning woman in eyes love-lit for him. But that word he did not speak. If she awoke, it must be of herself she awoke. The deep interest with which he waited he thought was only interest.

She charmed him as he had never before been charmed. He had in the distant past felt for one woman a violent passion that had wrecked his youth and tainted his manhood; he had felt since then for divers women gusts of passion that had cooled

and been forgotten; he had even experienced a friendship for women—women of a class to whom friendship is rare—but as he felt toward Lucilla he had never before felt.

They dined together in the small private parlour at Stone's. A sweet, pleasant dinner-hour, with the river shining through the open casement, and the evening air warm with the scent of honeysuckle. They sat by the window when they had finished dining, and in the moonlight talked of many things. Lucilla, so happy that nothing more practical than poetry could touch her; Mordaunt, so contented that time stood still for him.

It was an unpleasant reminder when the maid, who had waited on them at dinner, came in and said that 'missus wanted to shut up, as master was away at Henley, and she did not care to keep open so late.'

'So late!' ejaculated Rivers in dismay, looking at his watch.

'It is past ten, sir.'

It was past ten, and, as he knew, the last train went at 9.47. He looked at Lucilla with dismay. She laughed, and clapped her hands with childish glee.

‘How splendid! Now we shall stay here, and spend another glorious day to-morrow.’

Mordaunt was the embarrassed one—Lucilla evidently pleased. The girl stood at the door and waited instructions. He waited a minute.

‘Do let us stay,’ she said pleadingly; ‘it will be so sweet!’

Mordaunt saw vividly that she had no more idea of anything strange or out of the way in her spending the night here, in this village inn, with him, than if she had been seven instead of seventeen; and it must be considered a point in his favour that no thought or idea that would sin against her innocence entered his mind while he looked at her and thought over what he should do.

She coaxed him to stay, and, indeed, he had little choice. He knew Nettie and Rolly were at Henley, so he did not fear her being missed at home. He was less troubled by conjectures as to what the servants might think than if she had a different home-world, and, telling Lucilla that ‘it was all right—he would manage,’ he left her alone while he made arrangements.

They were soon made. The landlady, a kind motherly sort of woman, to whom he explained

the situation in a few simple words, agreed to look after Lucilla; for him there was another inn in the village, where he could get a bed.

So it was settled, and when they parted for the night Lucilla accompanied her good-bye kiss to Mordaunt—which she stood on tiptoe to give, and which, it may be said, he scarcely responded to, so uneasily circumspect was he—with renewed expressions of delight at the prospect of such another day.

And Lucilla slept that night a happy, restful sleep—full of rose-coloured dreams of summer sights and sounds. But Mordaunt tossed about uneasily; he did not think, yet could not keep from thinking. If he slept a troubled sleep for a few moments Lucilla's form filled his arms, or her hand clasped his. He was possessed by her; he could not shake off the trammel. Sometimes he cursed himself for his idiotic scruples; sometimes he called himself an unutterable villain for having won the child's affections—for having so far led her from the right path. But whether he blamed himself for the one thing or for the other, he could not sleep at all. Always before him was Lucilla—her fair skin, her short hair, the down on her cheeks—his imagination brought her before

him in his half-sleeping, half-waking state, in every conceivable and inconceivable situation. It was years since he had spent such a night, so full of mingled feelings, so unrestful. Yet at times he tasted happiness. This sweet girl-child loved him, and in his dreams he was a free man, and was loving her in return.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE morning dawned. Lucilla, rising early, threw open her window ; she gazed over the greenness of the earth with rapture. To breathe the fresh, pure air was happiness ; she heard the young thrushes singing in the trees.

The atmosphere was lighter and brighter than she had ever seen atmosphere ; the river's gleams were transparent, giving coolness and beauty to the open landscape. In the distance, through the haze of early morning, the green of the trees melted into gray : they seemed as clouds against the sky ; above them the clouds on the horizon looked like the dim outlines of untrodden mountains.

Once again the spirit of Nature possessed her, and thrilled her into a warmth that was almost womanhood. During the day, this beautiful July day, that she and Mordaunt spent again together on the quiet river, with the sun shining in bright

patches on the waters, and the blue sky reflected in their depths, her happiness was calm and boundless. But to Mordaunt there was a difference. His night haunted him ; he could not look upon her any more as a child, and in this new development of his feelings he knew not what to do. He dared not caress her ; and she also—warmed by Nature, not by him, into a deep love—could only sit silent and enraptured, never questioning the secure foundations of her reveries of engrossing delight.

The canoe drifted with them here and there, at the sweet will of the waters, among the green flowering flags, beneath tender new branches of trees. The morning warmth blazed into the noon-day heat, the noonday heat waned into the cool of the evening.

Then it was all over for them—this two days' summer idyl. Mordaunt, fully awake to the situation, would not risk missing another train, and Lucilla's eyes filled with tears as she gave a last look round ; but Nettie would be home to-morrow morning ; go they must. Lucilla, feeling it inevitable, submitted.

In the railway-carriage, which they had to themselves, she gave way entirely ; she cried, and

Mordaunt took her into his arms and let her cry there. As he bent over her, as he held her, he felt the tide of his feelings growing higher ; it was by an effort he prevented himself from telling her they need not go home at all—they would stay here together always.

He did not know what restrained him ; it was a proposition that a month or two ago would have seemed to him the easiest and most natural. But now he could not do it ; he could not find the words in which to ask her. It was her trust in him, the utter confidence with which she gave herself up to him, that had aroused some dormant spirit of a manliness he yet retained, and made him vow to himself, while longing for her, that she should not come to harm through him. He formed no plans for the future, made no resolution, but he kept his arms around her loosely ; he would not tighten them. He kissed her feverishly, often, but he kissed her lightly. He kept the mastery over himself while he wiped away her tears and soothed her into quietness.

But he asked himself now and afterwards why he had done so. Roland's daughter, Nettie's step-daughter ! They reached Southampton Row. The oppression on Lucilla's heart deepened, the sense

of impending misfortune grew crushing. It was fully realized.

Nettie herself opened the door to them. She stood on the threshold and saw them together. For hours she had been working herself into this passion, barely hoping the objects of it would come here so that she might wreak it upon them—a mad unreasoning passion of jealousy against Mordaunt, of spite—murderous spite—against Lucilla.

Mordaunt, with one glance at her working face, dark with its unuttered rage, realized what was coming, and his first thought was to spare Lucilla. But it was too late. Lucilla was already out of the cab, standing by him ; Mordaunt closed the hall-door.

Nettie made a step forward, as if to strike the girl.

‘You . . . how dare you come here !’ she hissed out. Mordaunt put his arms around the shrinking, terror-stricken girl.

‘Shut up !’ he said harshly to Nettie ; ‘don’t make a fool of yourself ; the girl is all right. We missed the train last night.’

‘How dare you bring your . . . into my house !’ Nettie could scarcely bring out the words ; she was almost incoherent. She barred the

way to the dining-room door, and raved at them in the hall, before a limited audience of servants, who crowded up the kitchen-stairs to see the fun.

There was not a foul name she did not hurl at the girl, who only shrunk closer and closer to Mordaunt's side, to shelter from the storm, whose full significance she failed to understand.

Her clinging to Mordaunt, her dumb appeal to him, maddened Nettie yet further.

'Go out of my house!' she shrieked—'go at once! I won't have you here, not a moment, not a second! Take her home to your wife if you want shelter for her; she is just such another . . . they will be good companions.' She stamped her feet, and even made a step towards them, as if to physically enforce her commands.

At the words 'Take her home to your wife,' Lucilla started from Mordaunt's side. She looked up at him with an appealing, startled glance. Free from her, he made a step forward and grasped Nettie's shoulder.

'Be quiet!' he almost shook her; 'don't give us any more of your foulness. I know you've got a lot more of it in you—keep it there. The girl is as pure and innocent as possible; she is going to

stay here. And you are going to hold your tongue, or I'll——'

Nettie wrenched herself free from him ; she was beside herself with rage, or might have been more careful of her words.

'Or you'll tell Roland that it is not only with his daughter, but with his wife, you have shown your friendship to him. You cur!' she shrieked.

'Wife!' sneered Mordaunt bitterly.

'How dare you—how dare you!' she yelled, and sprang at him like a wild cat. He used his strength to keep her at arm's length. He could not shut her mouth, he could not prevent her giving vent to some of the vilest thoughts that ever disfigured the brains or lips of woman, and he could not close Lucilla's ears against the torrent.

Sickened by it at length, and seeing no end to Nettie's invectives, he pushed her away ; and going over to Lucilla, he said almost roughly :

'Come away ; this is no place for you.'

He took her by the arm. Her face was white, and she was trembling in every limb. She could hardly see before her. The world, so bright an hour before, was blotted out now ; and in her wretched brain everything seemed blurred with

the close smell of the house, the dust in the corner, the stains on the carpet. Nettie's face was old and lined, her hair rough ; she was dishevelled, soiled, and this soiling of Nettie's spread. This spreading, general uncleanness, this dirt, this decay, was real life. Sinclair Furley had always been telling her so, though she never had understood him until now. She was tainted with it, and Mordaunt ; it was spreading everywhere. Was it spreading from Nettie ? She was turning giddy, sick, dying, choked with the filth of this universal rottenness. There had been another world—a green, pure, beautiful world—she had forgotten it ; it was only a dream.

What were these terrible words Nettie was saying ? and why was she looking at her ? Was it all her fault ? What had she done ? And Mordaunt, and Mordaunt's wife . . . another vile thing, like Nettie.

‘ Oh, go away, phantoms ! go away, Mordaunt, everybody ! . . . ’ Her head was going round and round, and she could not see or hear. The pain was more than she could bear ; she must shriek out, she must. . . . Quietness fell upon her. Nettie's and Mordaunt's faces were indistinct, and their voices had gone a long way off. Some-

one had hold of her arm, was leading her into a cab. They were rolling away ; an arm was around her, her head, heavy and dull, was resting somewhere. She was getting better from that hideous dream.

Marius, her twin brother, was not to be the only sufferer for a parent's sin ! The vertigo that seized her—and that held her down and dulled her senses—was but a feeble echo of those wild fits of his ; but it was an echo of the same strain.

Consciousness returned slowly, imperceptibly. The cab had stopped, she knew not where ; the arm was still around her, supporting her. There was a door banged behind her. Some harsh, female voice called out :

‘It's another of them drabs he is bringing in.’ Then she found herself resting on a sofa, a pillow behind her back. She struggled to regain her senses, but felt dulled ; she could not think very clearly, her head was aching violently, and of what had passed about her, what she had seen or heard, she could not quite remember the significance.

She sat up and looked around her. She was alone, but she could hear footsteps in the adjoin-

ing room ; the door that connected the two was slightly ajar. The one she was in, evidently the front one, was simply furnished. A big writing-table, many-drawered, ink-splotched, and untidy with papers, was in the centre, a wooden arm-chair in front of it. There were a few other chairs, the horsehair bursting out of the shabby green leather ; the rickety sofa she was lying on, and that was almost all. On the walls, hung with some dirty and faded paper, were many bookshelves, on which were many books in confused and irregular heaps ; beneath one set of shelves was a cupboard, the glass doors cracked, and hanging loosely. Through the open window, with its dirty panes of glass, came a roar of voices and vehicles, that told her she was somewhere in the heart of the great City.

And further she had no time to get, for Mordaunt came in.

‘Drink this,’ he said. He had a glass in his hand. ‘It is eau-de-Cologne ; it will revive you, but you look better already.’

She did not look much better ; though some colour had come back to her cheeks, her eyes were still glazy, immobile.

She drank the cordial, and Mordaunt stood

looking at her, in a silence that must be described as embarrassed.

‘You feel all right now, don’t you?’ he asked.

‘Yes, thank you.’

She made an effort to rise, but he stopped her.

‘Sit still; you are not well yet.’

‘Where am I?’

He took a chair beside her.

‘In the Strand, Cecil Street; you are quite safe. That wretched woman frightened you, didn’t she?’

He took her hand.

Lucilla freed it, and put it to her aching head; tried to remember *what* frightened her; pushed back her straw hat. She took it off and looked at it. It was the hat she had bought specially for the day on the river, out of some money her father had given her. Looking at it, memory did not seem so far off.

‘Yes,’ she answered slowly, staring at the hat with its brightly-coloured ribbon, ‘she frightened me.’

‘You will not go back to her,’ he said, very softly, and placed his arm around her.

‘No?’ said Lucy questioningly, looking at him

and disengaging herself. 'Where shall I go? I don't know. I have nowhere to go.' She stood up again, and this time she was stronger; her legs did not tremble so much. 'I must go back, I think.'

He too stood up, but he did not touch her. He said to her, very softly and tenderly:

'You will stay with me.'

'With you?'

'With me, dear.'

There was more gentleness, more tenderness than passion, in his voice, in his manner, as he drew her to him and held her. She was a child—an unprotected, desolate child—but as he clasped her, as he thought of what his words meant, his feelings grew, he held her closer, he stooped down to kiss her lips. Her lips were cold; he pressed them warmly, yet more warmly; Lucilla drew back—shrank from him. He would not let her go, he would not yield to her; he held her tightly, kissed her again and again, grew from warmth into passion, startled her into full consciousness. He could feel, then, there was a response to his ardour—slight, maidenly, but still a response.

'My darling,' he said to her, 'you will stay

with me always. Don't try to get away from me; I shall never let you go. You will never repent it. I love you, my darling, and I have never loved another woman like this. You love me—say so—don't you love me? Forget Nettie, forget everything, but just that you love me, and we are going to be very happy together.'

Mordaunt was growing excited and eager; there was something in Lucilla's manner that did not quite satisfy him—a quietness, a hesitation.

'I can't stay here,' she said slowly.

She looked around her.

'Only for this one night—to-morrow we will find somewhere better. Some nice little place in the country. You will like that; you love the country.'

'I did!—I did!' said poor Lucilla, clasping her head with both hands. 'But it is spoilt! it is soiled! We were there together, and Nettie said——'

'Never mind what Nettie said. Nettie is mad. Forget her. Listen only to me.'

He held her again. He pleaded with vigour, with ardour.

And Lucilla listened, her head against his

shoulder, his brown beard mingling with her gold curls. The chill that she had felt passed away from her, a new warmth seemed thrilling through her veins, her heart began to beat with rapid throbs. He was no longer her hero, her protector ; he was something dearer, closer than that. Every minute she was growing better from her faint, feeling more acutely. She loved him. There was no one else who cared for her like this—whom she cared for like this. There was no happiness on earth like this she was beginning to feel.

After a time Mordaunt left her for a moment while he went to give his landlady some instructions.

‘ I will be back in five minutes, sweetest ; we shall never be parted any more.’

He went out through the bedroom, leaving the door open. That answering thrill that Lucilla had felt as he kissed her was still in her—a thrill of pleasure, excitement, joy beyond all words or expression. Yes, while he was with her ; but now she was alone the excitement, the throbbing was still there. But it was not pleasure, memory, expectation. It was—it was——

‘ O God ! what shall I do ?—what must I do ?’

It was fright ; it was terror. There was some-

thing unknown before her. Her heart was beating so fast; she was suffocating. She could not sit still; she was in deadly terror of something—she knew not what. It must be Mordaunt—it was Mordaunt! She could not stay to see him—she would not stay. She must run away somewhere—anywhere. The door! No, she would not go through that room. She was shuddering—frightened. She took up her hat, she rushed from the room, as one who fears pursuit; her breath coming fast, and that strange thrill still exciting her. She must run away; she must hide. Her lips were warm and full with his kisses; but she did not want them—she fled from them. Down through the dark, narrow staircase, swiftly, timidly; out through the open door, into the thronged, full streets, away from that narrow room where she had found something—had fled from something—knowing neither what nor why she had run, but running on.

Thus did her sex assert itself, and her innocence prove its own safeguard. Maidenliness, modesty, —uncultivated, unsuspected—broke out and drove her forth in the middle of the night, to seek from her lover's arms the shelter of the open streets!

CHAPTER XIV.

MORDAUNT's interview in some back region with his landlady took him some time longer than he had anticipated. He was impatient to be back with Lucilla; he was still conscious of her kisses, of the love she had so freely given him. But certain arrangements had to be made, and his landlady was not very complaisant. It was fully half an hour before he returned to the sitting-room, eager, loverlike.

He could scarcely believe his eyes when he found it empty. Dumbfounded for the moment, he stood still. He was conscious of a shock of chill and disappointment, of even anger at the girl; but to that feeling quickly succeeded another, namely, fear and anxiety for the girl herself. Of course he went feverishly through the two rooms, down the staircase, looking wherever he could look. But Cecil Street, Strand, is not a palatial abode, and there are no elaborate curtains or

draperies wherein she might be hidden. Hope of that sort was very soon over.

He went back into the room and sat down on the well-worn wooden chair.

‘Damnation!’

That was the first word that rose to his lips; not meaningless it seemed to him in the first sick moment of dread. ‘Damnation!’—his or hers? The blow was sudden, and he could not realize its import. Again and again he searched; behind curtains, in corners, under the sofa, even in the bedroom, where perchance she might have doubled back on him. He questioned the landlady feverishly again and again, until that irate person resented it by an insinuation so foul that the man fell back from her, white and aching, with fear and a feeling about his heart of pain so great that he could not stand with it.

‘Lucy, Lucy, child!’ he cried; ‘come back!’ But there was no answer. ‘My God! what have I done? where has she gone?’ he cried again. But the silence, full of wheels and horses’ hoofs, was empty of Lucilla. Up and down the stairs again, and into the streets even, where the thronged pavements echoed hurrying footsteps, but hers were not among them. Back into the

room again, empty, cold, and maddening, in that it gave no answer to the question that broke again and again from him in his despair : ‘ Where is the child ?’

His arms were empty, his heart as heavy as lead. Where was the child ? His heavy heart turned him sick with the tenderness thrown back upon itself, and the dread and fear that found no words. He put his head down on his arms, and groaned aloud in his impotence that saw no help.

But now a hope burst upon him, and he sprang from his seat and commenced walking up and down the room. She was not gone from his reach altogether ; conscience had stung her that she was at fault, and the child, tender and easily moved, had but rushed back to Southampton Row to plead again with Nettie for belief and forgiveness. Vividly he pictured the trembling, terrified girl, the enraged woman ; Mordaunt had no hopes in Nettie. He groaned again as he thought of the scene, but he could not leave her to brave it alone, now the idea possessed him she was at Southampton Row ; he would not listen to any doubts that still intruded. She had gone home, away from his love that had startled her ; he had not been gentle enough ; his poor little timid girl had been

frightened at him, but she would be more frightened with Nettie—and Nettie, brute that she was, might even still fail to believe her story. Those two together, Lucilla and Nettie! and he not there to protect her! Why, this certainly was worse than the nameless dread that filled his heart when he found her gone from his rooms, and scarcely free from her faint, alone and in such a neighbourhood.

He rushed out again hatless; the passing hansom that he hailed was all too slow—it crawled; and meantime Nettie might be talking to the girl, or might, even worse, or yet, perhaps, not worse, have thrust her back into the streets, and he not there to help.

He was out of the hansom and at the door long before the phlegmatic cabman had pulled up. And then for a moment his senses came back; the house was quiet; there was a light in the hall: that showed Rolly was not yet home; and what did it all mean, and was the girl there?

He rang, and the footman opened the door. He stared at Mordaunt's pale, distracted face; he held the door, not knowing whether to let him in or not.

Mordaunt answered that question by pushing his way in, and closing the door behind him.

‘Is anyone up, John?’ he asked in an agitated tone.

‘The missus ain’t gone to bed, sir, but she is up in her room,’ replied the factotum, full of curiosity.

Mordaunt went into the dining-room, followed by the man. And Mordaunt, Mordaunt Rivers, was actually too nervous to ask the next question that trembled on his lips.

‘Tell me,’ he said at length, ‘what happened when she came home?’ He was full of anxiety and fear for the answer.

‘The missus?’

‘No, no; damn the missus! I mean now, just now, when Miss Lucilla came in.’

‘When you and Miss Lucy came in?’ repeated the man in perplexity, looking at Mordaunt as if he had gone out of his mind.

Mordaunt nearly shook him, so mad and impatient was he.

‘Hasn’t Miss Lucy been here since then?’

‘Since then? No, sir, I should think she ain’t,’ added the man emphatically. ‘And wouldn’t be likely to if she could hear how the missus has been going on ever since she came home, and Jane let out quite accidentally that Miss Lucy went out with you yesterday, and hadn’t come home yet.’

Mordaunt's legs refused to bear the burden of their master ; he sat down. 'What am I to do ? what am I to do ?' he said, almost mechanically. Mechanically, too, he drew out his watch ; an hour and a half now since he left her. Not in his rooms, not in his house, not here ! 'Lucy, Lucy !' All these last two days she had been with him, growing deeper into his heart ; his dreams had been of her, and she had filled his waking—his waking and his sleeping—hours. Now his arms—his arms were empty ; and the girl—what of the girl, and where was she ?

'I did hear, sir,' went on the man confidentially, as he sat there immobile, 'that there had been a awful row between the missus and master ; that Signor Antonelli, he'd been too civil to Miss Gay, and the missus had insulted her, and the master took her part, and,' here he sank his voice to a whisper, 'I don't think there's no good you waiting, for the master ain't coming home to-night.'

It all went empty through Mordaunt's brain. Lucilla ! What had become of Lucilla ?

He asked the man again and again if he were sure she had not come home. He even insisted on his going up to the girl's room to see if she had not come home perhaps without his knowing it.

All of no use—the girl was not there. He rushed back to Cecil Street ; no trace, no tidings. It was nearly three now ; two whole mortal hours. He was not going to think of it ; he clenched his teeth hard. Lucilla, in her fair childish beauty, rose before him ; the bright, happy girl who had begged him to stay until to-morrow, to have one more delightful day in the country.

He could not rest in the room. He went out in the street and stood still so long that a curious policeman, who had been watching him, thought perhaps that he was too drunk to get on, and wanted assistance.

‘ Fine night, sir,’ he said tentatively.

It was a fine night, warm and bright, the moon at its fullest, the dark night clouds star-spangled. Mordaunt looked at the policeman.

‘ Suppose you lost a girl in the middle of the Strand, and you did not know where on earth she had got to, what would you do ?’

‘ A wrong ’un ?’ interrogatively.

‘ Curse you, no ; a girl, a child.’

‘ I should inquire at Bow Street.’

‘ Of course, what a fool I am. Here, take this,’ he threw him a half-crown. ‘ And find me a hansom if you can.’

He drove to Bow Street as quickly as he could, though what he expected to find there, and what was to be the upshot of it, God knows—he did not.

The inspector received him civilly, and listened to his rather lame story.

‘You were taking the girl home, and you suddenly lost sight of her just near Cecil Street, Strand, and this was at one o’clock. Was there anyone in sight?’ he asked, pausing in writing down the account.

Mordaunt was non-plussed. There were two policemen in the room as well as the inspector ; he could not explain matters before such an audience.

‘Look here,’ he said abruptly to the man, ‘let me speak to you alone, and I’ll explain matters. I must have the girl found.’

The requisite orders were given ; but Mordaunt did not find the inspector a sympathetic audience. The matter seemed mysterious to him ; this fine young man, for Mordaunt still looked a young man, with his halting story about taking a girl home, and losing her in the streets. A young girl, a pretty girl, a girl to whom he said he was not related. And even now Mordaunt put his case very badly.

‘The girl had been away with me for a day, and when we got back there was a row at home. She . . . they turned her out of the house, and I had no choice ; I took her home with me ; I left her for a few moments to give some orders ; when I came back she was gone.’

He waited.

‘She has run back home, probably.’

‘I have just come from there. She has not been heard of.’

‘Well, sir, if you will give me a description——’ preparing to write—‘I will have inquiries made. I have no doubt, under the circumstances you tell me, she has gone to some of her friends.’

‘She hasn’t a friend in the world, but myself.’

‘Then you think . . .?’

‘I don’t know what I think, or fear ; I am half mad with suspense.’

The inspector began to unbend, as he saw the gentleman was really in trouble, the girl he was after a good girl, and the whole affair genuine ; in fact, so far sympathetic did he grow, that when he was relieved from duty, he volunteered to go round with him to all the likely places where they might get information.

What a night Mordaunt spent ! From policeman to policeman, from station to station, finally from hospital to hospital. Nobody had seen a fair, young girl, almost a child, in a white flannel dress and a sailor hat ; yet surely the costume is not common in the middle of the night. Suggestions were made, opinions were given ; suggestions that were maddening in their hideous uncertainty, opinions for any one of which Mordaunt could have murdered the giver on the spot.

It is needless to dilate on the horrors they saw, or the fearful places they went into. They searched every possible and impossible place in the West End of London ; they questioned every vile woman whom they met, and they tried to wring news from people, who had it not to give, by threats and bribes ; but from all their exertions they gleaned nothing. One or two women told them they had seen such a girl, as they described, ‘among the lot’ that were in Piccadilly ; but they could not get this confirmed, and Mordaunt would not hear it or credit it.

The moon faded, and the twinkling stars died in the dawn. The sun arose redly from out of its hot-bed of mist, and a life that was not the

foul life of the night began to stir in the streets. Blinds were pulled up, like human eyes opening lazily to the morning work. Milk-carts rattled over the stones ; London began to bestir itself in the daylight, but still they had discovered no trace of what they were seeking.

Mordaunt looked haggard and ill ; his eyes were bloodshot.

‘ You’d best go home now, sir ; we’ll bring you news the instant we get it. There is nothing more you can do just now.’

He went home, and sat in the room he had left the girl in. What he had seen, what he had heard—though none of it new to him, though nothing he had not known of, perhaps contributed to—bore a different aspect when looked at as he had looked at it to-night, through Lucilla’s pure eyes. The uncertainty of her fate weighed on him like a hideous nightmare, and neither Roland nor Nettie, nor himself, found place in his thoughts.

He buried his head in his hands. Every imaginable horror that could have befallen a girl pressed about him. He did not feel like a lover whose promised mistress was torn from his arms ; he felt like a man who had let an innocent child

sink into a bottomless pit for want of a restraining hand. He loved her more during this wretched night than he had loved her before. Before, she had been a sweet episode in his daily life; now she became to him his one responsibility, his one crime.

CHAPTER XV.

BUT Mordaunt Rivers was not an idle gentleman, living on his means. He was a man whose brain had to find his daily food. He could not afford to be idle any longer. This was Tuesday, *Foot-lights* came out on Wednesday; after his two days' idleness he had work to do.

A journalist and an actor are the real slaves of the public; the one must write, the other must act, no matter what tragedy is going on in that little of private life they either of them possess.

So Mordaunt took his tub and his breakfast, and sat down like a brave man to forget the incidents of the night, and of the last two days, and to get up funny or spicey paragraphs, or columns, for his paper. But his work came heavy and hard to him this morning. To write a suggestive lie, or even truth, about 'Maudie Vavasour,' or the girl who had just made her last appearance on the boards of the Royal Music

Hall, seemed rather sickening to him, when he had just come away from seeing where such 'Maudies' and such 'girls' ended the career that he foreshadowed.

He could not work at all in this humour. The room was too full for him of remembrance and of regret. He still saw Lucilla there, as he had carried her in last night, as he had held her in his arms and felt her clinging, vaguely answering lips.

He thought he could finish better at the office ; but walking down the busy Strand, looking under every bonnet, watching every hurrying figure, the girl was not less present to him.

Footlights offices consisted of two rooms ; one was ink-splashed and papers-littered, and here the work was done. The other communicated with it only by a trap-door arrangement in the wall. It was approached by a different staircase ; this was Rolly's sanctum ; it was comfortably, almost luxuriantly furnished.

Mordaunt thought of Roland sitting there at his ease, perhaps with Tessie Gay, perhaps with Jenny Farrell ; and he thought of Roland's daughter, and Roland's little care for her, and his heart grew hot and bitter against his whilom friend.

He did his work as well as he was able for thinking of all this. Then he left the office, but somehow he could not leave; it pressed upon him, these two pictures: Rolly lounging in a chair or sofa, or with his half empty glass, his eager, voluble talk; Rolly's daughter, with her appealing eyes, and wistful smile, in some dire strait, alone.

He paused, irresolute, a moment; then hastily running upstairs, broke in upon the editorial repose.

'Hallo, Mordaunt, old man! Come in; shut the bally door, it's cold. Got copy enough? I'm not up to work myself this morning; you can manage, I suppose?'

Rolly was sprucely dressed; frock-coat. He was one of those stout men who affect frock-coats and gardenias. His high hat well-brushed and glossy, his patent-leather boots shining.

'You're glum. Anything wrong?' Rolly avoided Mordaunt's eye; he seemed a little nervous and shaky. 'Seen Nettie?'

'I saw her last night.'

Both men waited. Rolly wanted to hear if Mordaunt had heard of his row with Nettie, and what he thought of it. Mordaunt wanted to know if

Rolly had heard of Lucilla's disappearance, and if he blamed him for it.

‘What did she say?’

‘She was like a lunatic. God knows what she didn't say.’

‘I've half a mind not to go back there.’ He looked inquiringly, irresolutely at Mordaunt. ‘I'll tell you how it was. Lusher had two house-boats, and he'd asked the usual party. Nettie was to be in the first boat with the steady ones—the McDougals, and that semi-respectable lot—and Tessie Gay and Arthur Campbell, and all the music-hall division, were to be in the other. Lord Sandel was going to bring her down, but it seems he missed the train. That Whitechapel brute, Antonelli, came with her. The instructions about the boats were muddled, and we were all together. We had a fairly jolly day, though the women were sparring at each other; but in the evening . . . Tessie was singing. We were all a little “on.” Antonelli joined in the chorus, or said something, I am not very clear about it; you see, it was after dinner, and there had been a lot of wine flying about. Anyway, Nettie fired up and insulted Tessie; said she wasn't fit company for her to have been asked to meet. Of course Tessie

couldn't stand that ; there was a row royal. I took Tessie's part ; you see, it was chiefly through me she was asked. The upshot of it was, Nettie came back to town. I slept at Long's. What did she say to you ?'

'It was about Lucilla.'

'Good Heavens ! By Jove ! do you know, I'd clean forgotten the girl's existence. I say, I hope she won't wreak her spite against me on the girl. Poor little Lucy ! Extraordinary thing, on my word ; until this moment, I'd never given the girl a thought.'

'No,' answered Mordaunt bitterly. 'I don't find it so difficult—so very difficult—to believe.' Rolly finished up his brandy and soda. Mordaunt strove to gain the command over his speech—he was boiling with rage and indignation at Rolly's utter selfishness. 'We missed the last train. Lucilla hadn't been home all night. . . . Nettie said——'

'Why, what on earth is the matter, Rivers, old man ? You're as white as a ghost. What is it all about ? Have a drink. Where was Lucy, and what was it to Nettie ? I'm quite at sea. I don't know what you're taking about.'

Mordaunt leaned heavily against a chair. He

had the wildest, most unreasoning inclination to take hold of Rolly and murder him for his neglect, for his indifference, for his coldness.

Something he must do or say, or tell him. For once he took the proffered drink ; he was just going to begin, and to tell Rolly the history of the night, when the door was flung open noisily.

‘ Well, upon my word——’

Nettie, nearly black in the face with rage and surprise and baffled hate and spite, stood between the two men.

Rolly had not been home all night ; but that had not alarmed her for his allegiance. But she had spent the night nursing wild schemes of vengeance against Mordaunt ; so unreasoning an animal was Nettie, that Tessie and Antonelli and Rolly had all sunk into the background. All her concentrated evil tempers had fixed themselves upon Mordaunt and the unhappy Lucilla.

‘ Get out of here,’ she said harshly to Mordaunt.

‘ No,’ he returned quickly ; ‘ I have not yet spoken to Rolly.’

Rolly looked from one to the other ; looked round the room, with its Maple upholstery, its sofas and easy-chairs, as if for some means of escape

from the explanation he saw was impending ; but there was no such means.

‘ If Rolly had the spirit of a mouse he’d put you out, or send for a policeman.’

He looked at her, and what she read in the look maddened her. She sprang at him like a wild cat. He caught her by the two hands, and held her there tight.

‘ I’ll call a policeman ; I’ll give you in custody ; it’s a punishable offence. I’ll make it as hot as I can for you. I’ll produce your wife ; I know where she is.’

‘ I dare say. Have you done ?’

‘ No, I shan’t have done with you until you’ve got your board and lodging at Government expense ; and then I shan’t, for I’ll come and see you on visiting days, and tell you what the boys are saying, and what the girl is——’

‘ My patience is nearly exhausted. Say a word about that girl, let her pure name pass your foul lips, and I’ll——’

He had almost lost his self-control. He put his hand on her throat.

Rolly jumped up and came between them.

‘ Here, drop that, Mordie, old man ; what is it all about ?’

In two terrible sentences Nettie told him.

‘It is a criminal charge!’ she shrieked out. ‘I’ll have the law of him!’

Rolly grew white. For the moment he was a father.

‘Send for a policeman!’ she shouted.

Rolly moistened his lips before he spoke, and his voice was harsh and unnatural.

‘You are quite right, Nettie,’ he said. ‘It’s—it’s a criminal offence.’

Mordaunt sneered bitterly.

‘Prosecute me,’ he said, dropping his hands from Nettie, facing them both.

‘I will,’ answered Nettie, hoarse with passion.

‘Do you know what my plea would be?’

‘I don’t care.’

‘I should plead guilty. I should plead that I took the girl out of a disreputable house, where you live with a woman who is not your wife. I should call Lady Lusher and Miss Farrell as specimens of your visiting circle. I’d have Nettie and you in the witness-box together. My God!’ losing his patience, ‘to think of people like *you* talking of law. My God! what people you are! And you dare to threaten me, because I have taken her out of the sink before she was as foul as the rest of you there.’

There would have been murder done if Nettie

could have had her way. Mordaunt stood quiet enough under her onslaught, now that he had his say. Rolly had been his friend, and Nettie had been his friend ; but in these moments a loathing and disgust for them both filled his mind. He would deny nothing, and explain nothing. Nettie's inflamed countenance and disordered apparel were no more to him than Rolly's spruceness and his white face. He had an inclination to seize him by the throat, and squeeze out his selfish, loose-living existence. He was Lucilla's father, and Nettie—Nettie was all she had known of a mother.

He leaned up against the door, while Nettie poured forth her vituperation, and Rolly stood still and listened.

'There, there, that's enough,' he said at length. 'All that garbage won't sink me. I can't stand any more of it ; I am going. Rolly, when you are alone, I have something to say to you.'

'I don't want to have anything to do with you.'

Mordaunt shrugged his shoulders and went. He left the well-assorted couple together. He had not told Rolly how far he was blameless ; he had not told Rolly, as he had meant, of his misery about the fate of the girl. He thought, as he went out, that he would break every tie

that still bound him to these people ; give up his editorship of *Footlights* ; find some pursuit or occupation that could give him back his self-respect and independence.

He went home, and sent in his resignation to the paper. Then his heart failed him ; the most terrible, overwhelming pity surged over him for the lost girl. She was lost from her birth, lost in her childhood ; there had never been any hope for her, but it appalled him. The day crushed over him, heavily over him ; the moments were hours, the hours days, and yet when night came he could have prayed out aloud : ‘ O God, put back the time ! ’—so vividly did the night horrors she might be seeing press before his phantom-haunted brain.

He wandered about all that night ; he wandered many weary nights. His days were empty of everything, save his useless search, his brain acting only in the one direction.

But days passed, and weeks passed, and months passed, and the juggernaut of time, in its passing, erased all trace and footstep of the girl he sought. She had vanished in the abyss, been swallowed up in the darkness of the city, and the darkness gathered deeper around him, and shut him out from his fellows.

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE were times when the memory of her, as he had seen her that day, with her blue eyes full of tears at the happiness the mere sight of green trees and cool waters had given her, would almost drive him to suicide, with the uncertainty as to what those eyes would be gazing on now, as to the hopelessness of that pure trusting look ever again turning on him. He would sit in that comfortless room of his in Cecil Street evening after evening, with the roar of the street falling ever on his ears ; going over and over again the last time he had seen her ; feeling again the slender form in his arms, the lips growing warmer under his kisses. He would go to bed and lie awake hours, haunted by her, unable to rest, unable to think of anything save where she might be, what she might be going through, with no one by to aid her, no one by for her to lean on, whatsoever of degradation and misery she might be enduring.

Everyone accredited him with the girl's disappearance. The idle chaff, the hardly-veiled paragraphs, and 'answers to correspondents,' burned him like vitriol. The whole set, the drinking, bar-loafing, loose-living set, amongst whom his life had passed, became repulsive and degrading to him for the moment.

Mordaunt Rivers was five-and-thirty. Luxury had surrounded his boyhood ; he was the petted and only child of his mother ; she lived luxuriously, and nothing was too much for her boy to have. He was educated at Marlborough, and when he left he was captain of the school, full of promise and talent, a handsome, fearless lad, that any mother's heart might rejoice over.

He had never asked the source whence came the boundless means. Boys take these things more unquestioningly than girls. His holidays had been spent travelling with a tutor. Now that he came home, at nineteen, to consider his career, and rest from his school honours before plunging into life, there was no hand to guide him, no voice to restrain him ; he had only the experience of a schoolboy to aid him in keeping afloat on the sea of life in London.

He learnt to drink, to gamble, and to live

loosely, and never asked whose money supplied his daily wants; he took it from his mother without shame or blame, as a child does. It was not until he was a married man—a married man of twenty years of age, and awoke from a fevered love-dream of a week to find himself mated to a woman whose womanhood had vanished almost before he was born—that he learnt from her foul lips that his mother would have no cause to complain of him for his choice of a wife. Brought up to spend money like water, unthinkingly to see all things costly at his free command, he heard first, in the dawn of his manhood, from his wife's lips, how all these things had been obtained. In those first few months of despair and abandonment he placed it out of his power to free himself from the fetters he had forged.

From the shock of all that knowledge there emerged the grown man: a man without faith in humanity, in woman, in God. But still a man. At his tainted mother's feet he flung them all, spurning her away with bitterest words when she prayed him not to turn from her, not to take from her the one thing that saved her from the hell she had drifted into since his father died, and left her penniless with an unnamed child.

Sin succeeds sin, and sin succeeds sin, in ever-broadening circles. Mordaunt Rivers lived to outgrow his horror of his mother, to kiss her before she died, and never expect her to die repentant for what she had done. He had lived to see the woman he had made his wife go deeper down into the depths, as the drink-fiend grew on her with her age. Had seen her in the streets, and saved her from the streets, and seen her fall back again. He had lived even to outgrow his horror of her, and such as her, and to look upon it all as trivial and ordinary.

He had lived to laugh at his boyish despair, and to teach other lads to laugh when their eyes were opened and they had seen what he had seen—had learnt to think that all women were as these women, and that there was no life worth living but this life of revel, no city open to him but Bohemia.

He had made his way in that city ; forgotten or fought down his good instincts, made friends and a place for himself among people where his birth was never a reproach, where his wife was not worse than other men's wives, and where morality and right were as unknown words as duty and responsibility. He ate and drank and made merry—merry over vice, merry over misery, merry over

degradation of every kind. Had no ambition, save to keep himself from want ; had no desire, save to refrain always from thinking.

Then there came Lucilla into his life, and, like a pure stream flowing into a muddy river, disturbed its even surface.

Lucilla had disappeared, but Mordaunt could not be as he had been before he knew her.

He had an odd, sudden growth in moral strength. Under the influence of it, the scandal, the vulgarity, the coarseness that distinguished *Footlights* became distasteful to him. He sought for, and easily obtained, a post on another paper. He had never drank, but he gave up just now the habit of taking a brandy-and-soda for breakfast. And when the drunken outcast who called him husband made her next appeal on his purse, he even went the length of making a last final effort to save her from her life of public-houses and street corners and induce her to enter a Home.

She laughed at him ; she enjoyed her life in her own way, she said. He ought to allow her more, she grumbled. The next time she was up before a magistrate she would tell him her husband drove her to the streets through his meanness, and so forth. The miserable woman was known at every

police-court in London ; and Mordaunt, purposely poor, purposely unknown, still had the pleasure of seeing his name constantly dragged through the mud by her.

He had grown callous to that. Not to think, that had been the watchword of his years, and in the end the philosophy had almost conquered the man ; the passing hour had claimed all his thought, and he had been comparatively happy. Bitter enough, with a tongue and pen that lashed and stung. All possibilities he had sneered at, because for him there were none. He had forgotten, or perhaps did not know, that he could still feel as other men feel ; Lucilla had taught him. Still the years had left their mark, and gradually he drifted back again ; his virtue became attenuated for lack of nourishment, he had only himself to feed on. The hopelessness of his life became merged in the hopelessness of finding Lucilla, and the two miseries, finding a man wedded to suffering, could do no more to hurt him.

Months passed. He had kept away from Rolly from the Cormorant, from everywhere and everyone ; he had lived alone in those rooms whence the girl had fled. But this could not last. There came a time when the peopled solitude oppressed

him too deeply. A great man, or even a bad man, might have been driven to some course of action that would have changed his career. But Mor-daunt had not in him the elements of greatness ; under happier auspices one could imagine him a man ; but his youth-crisis had destroyed that chance, and he was only a Bohemian.

Sick of the room, sick of his solitude, of the mild platitudes with which he filled his column on the *Post*, he went out in the streets. There was no burning house for him to wreak his energies on, no adventures, no accidents to distract his attention.

So what did he do ? Nothing great, or grand, or even startling. He was sick of himself, and he wanted to be amused ; he did not feel like going to the club ; he still shrank from the chaff, for he failed to realize that the story had been forgotten. The streets were dull, the theatre boards did not attract. Idly he strolled for a moment into a music-hall.

The music-hall he turned into was the Eden. Scarcely interested, he stood for a few moments at the door, his thoughts hardly on the scene. But presently, emerging from thought, he noted a something unusual in the air of the place. Once attracted, his attention became concentrated.

To begin with, the place was crowded, the amphitheatre and the stuffy little boxes, the gallery and the entire hall of the building. All the 'boys' were there. There was a stir and an excitement among the audience, a surging to and fro, coarse chaff and comment, unceasing popping of corks. The atmosphere was heavy and thick with gas and smoke.

'What is on?' he asked of the first bystander ; for the stage was empty and gave him no information.

'They've got a new singer. Tessie Gay's got the "chuck" for being drunk ; and Tessie's friends are going to make a row, they say.'

Mordaunt, knowing well who Tessie's friends were, thought he was glad he came. As the cry of battle to the war-horse, so was the promise of a row to Mordaunt. He wanted something to take him out of himself—here was the something. After all, it was the boys who were his friends, and Rolly—well, in truth, Mordaunt was longing for a sight of Rolly's face, and Ted's and Tom's, and all of them. He had stayed away too long, and for nothing ; where were they all? Somewhere about, of that he might be sure, and eager to welcome him in their band. He had always been with

them, head and chief when the town was painted red ; the one man with a head on him when consequences were to be averted.

He made his way through the buildings carefully but steadily, and soon he reached the bar that runs parallel with the platform underneath, and at the right side.

He easily found what he sought. Tessie herself was drinking at the bar. Tessie, with her bold face, and pretty dimples, arrayed in rustling silk, diamonds in her ears, a white hat with feathers crowning her costume. Her elbows were on the bar, and she was talking volubly ; she was surrounded by a body-guard, of whom Rolly was the foremost, but supported by the whole staff of *Foot-lights*, and the Southampton Row habitués : Tom Furley, Charlie Morgan, Lord Lusher, Ted Smith—all Mordaunt's old pals.

Mordaunt took up his position behind a pillar ; he did not want to be seen just yet, only to see. And his judgment told him there would be plenty for him to see. Tessie was obviously half drunk, Rolly not far off ; all the rest of them a little on.

Sticks and umbrellas were rapped on the ground, cat-calls and impatient cries began to resound from

all parts of the house—loudest of all from the bar corner.

At length the little hand-bell was struck.

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ announced the prosy chairman, ‘Miss Tottie Tartkins will next appear.’

A momentary hush, during which a blowsy young lady, dressed in true music-hall style, liberal low neck, half short skirt, high-heeled shoes, advanced to the footlights.

The band struck up; she commenced. Her voice was no worse than other music-hall voices—she was not more vulgar or less vulgar than other music-hall artistes; but the public, who had resented the dismissal of their favourite, would have none of her. They shrieked her down with falsetto imitations, they stamped her down with sticks and umbrellas, they hissed her and cat-called her down with every variety of noise they could devise. Loudest of all, most prominent of all, Tessie and her little group of supporters in the corner.

Three times did the unfortunate girl commence. She grew pale underneath the rouge. It was her daily bread—and beer—they were depriving her of; but it was of no use. They didn’t and they

wouldn't hear her. Presently shouts for Tessie began to mingle with the other cries. Tessie, from her corner, acknowledged the cries, calling out to this or the other person she recognised, in her voice that seemed so common as it issued from the pretty lips ; nodding her head at them, while the feathers danced about.

Three times the chairman rose to order, three times he was yelled down, and the row went on worse than ever. Mordaunt, noting, saw the hall was filling quietly with policemen—saw them making their observations, then edging their way gradually toward the bar.

‘Ladies and gentlemen!’ shouted the chairman loudly, hoarsely, rapping on the table with all his might. ‘Ladies and gentlemen!’

‘Tessie! Tessie Gay!’

“O what a lark, out after dark,”

they began to strike up the first verse of the song by which their favourite had gained her reputation.

‘Tessie! We want to hear Tessie!’

“O what a lark”

More loud rapping.

‘Ladies and gentlemen, in the unavoidable absence of Miss Tessie Gay——’

‘ Oh, you liar !’

Up went Tessie’s shapely arm; in it a champagne-bottle, the first missile handy. The chairman got a broken head; the policemen made a rush. Some miscreant turned off the gas. Such a shrieking and howling as defies description followed. Before the gas went out Mordaunt had marked where Rolly stood. He went for him.

‘ That’s you, Rolly, isn’t it? Get out of this; here, hold on to me.’

‘ No, no; I must look after Tessie.’

‘ Tom’s looking after Tessie. I saw him before the gas went out. You don’t want all this in the papers to-morrow. Better clear——’

He took Rolly’s arm. By the time lights were procured and arrests being made, he had hurried him down the side and nearly to the door. Then Rolly tried to get free.

‘ I must go back. I must look after Tessie.’

‘ Tessie is all right; everybody will look after her. The police are batoning the crowd like mad. Come along.’

‘ Look out, look out, Rivers! *Footlights* to the rescue! Hurrah!’

Tom had caught sight of him—Tom Furley,

Ted Smith, and Charlie—and the whole crowd of them, bearing Tessie triumphantly in their midst, were shoving their way towards the door. There was no doubt they were thoroughly enjoying the *fracas*; but Tessie wouldn't be saved and wouldn't be hurried. She said she would sing, and she did sing. They had almost forcibly to carry her, while she shouted all the time:

‘O what a lark, out after dark,’

and the people took it up.

Law and order won. Tessie was arrested, and the *Footlights* contingent, in their rush to the rescue, narrowly missed the same fate. Some heads were broken—Rolly's among the number. He had all the awkwardness of obesity, and could neither help himself nor others; but, in the end, Mordaunt half led, half carried him into the streets, and, hailing a hansom, drove quickly to Cecil Street.

CHAPTER XVII.

ROLLY had been knocked about in the *fracas*. The blow on the head and the drink rather muddled his faculties. It seemed to him nothing strange that he should be in Mordaunt's room, and that Mordaunt should be helping him to get straight. And presently the other fellows came in, and to them also it seemed nothing strange that there had been a row, and that Rivers had been with them. Rivers's place was with them; he had always been with them.

But to Mordaunt it seemed very strange that Rolly should be sitting on the sofa where he had laid Lucilla that night; that these men should be in the room that had been the scene of his short love-story. But he was glad. He could not doubt it; their presence banished the spectres.

They talked over the affair while drinks were produced and wounds bound up.

‘But what is to become of Tessie? One of us must go and bail her out.’

‘I’ve arranged for that,’ answered Tom. ‘Lusher has gone. I don’t believe they would have stood one of us, and Sandel did not want to appear in the affair at all. He was dead against it from the first. I say, how drunk Tessie was!’

‘How did you manage about the gas?’

‘That’s my secret. As a matter of fact, bribery and Ted did it between them; but we mulled it afterwards. I meant Tessie to have given her song while the gas was out, and then the whole lot of us to have hoofed it before it was relit.’

‘Well, well, let’s go round to the Cormorant, and see what people are saying about it. They collared Ted, you know, but we got him away. I don’t believe they’ve arrested a single one of the right people, and they’ve got about fourteen poor devils altogether.’

‘Come on, Rivers, there’s some sparring on to-night. I’m just in the humour for it. There will be some sport to-night.’

‘I’ll follow you with Rolly when he has made himself look a little more decent,’ answered Mordaunt, seeing an opportunity. And they left him alone with Lucilla’s father.

Rolly was still on the sofa.

‘ Nettie will kick up a row when she hears I’ve been in this ; she’s got the needle about Tessie.’

‘ Oh, you’re still with Nettie?’

‘ Always shall be, I suppose. Mordaunt, old man, we’ve missed you awfully.’

‘ And I’ve missed you.’

The two men did not look at each other. The memory of Lucilla was between them ; but drawing them together were all the ties of old association. The paper, that Mordaunt had been on from the first ; Nettie, whom Mordaunt had always known ; the Southampton Row clique, that Mordaunt had always dominated.

‘ The paper is going to the devil.’

‘ Oh no, the paper is an accomplished fact. I’m sure it’s circulation hasn’t gone down. You’ve got all the rest of the old set, I see.’

‘ But there’s no go in it without you. It’s flat and stale.’

Neither of them spoke of Lucilla ; both were thinking of her.

‘ How does your head feel now?’

‘ All right ; I shan’t go to the Cormorant. It’s an age since we’ve had a chat.’

‘ What would Nettie say if she knew where you are ?’

‘She got over it a long time. Nettie’s tempers don’t last long, that’s one good thing about them. She’d be very glad to see you if you came.’

‘No, I won’t do that.’

There was a pause ; Rolly was rather at a loss what to say. He wanted Mordaunt back very badly ; he missed him in so many ways. He was willing to forgive him, but his own willingness made him uncomfortable ; he was afraid of what Mordaunt would think.

‘Rolly,’ began Mordaunt, rather unsteadily, getting up from his chair, walking to the window, and talking with his back turned to her father, ‘Lucilla is not with me.’

‘Let’s agree not to talk about that. You’ve taken her, and——’ there was positively a break in emotional Rolly’s voice, ‘I hope you’ll be good to her—better than ever I was. Come back to *Foot-lights* ; you can have double screw, or I’ll give the girl an income. Perhaps some day you might take me to see her. Poor little girl ! she hadn’t much of a chance ; you were the best fellow in our lot, Mordie. I’d like to tell her I don’t think any the worse of her.’

‘From the night Nettie turned her out of the house until this moment, I swear to my God I

have never set eyes on the girl. I would give my right hand at this moment to know where she is.'

Mordaunt had turned round and faced him. He was flushed, and his manner was so earnest and intense that Rolly sat up, pale, and stared at him curiously.

'What do you mean ; what on earth do you mean?'

Rolly sat up on the sofa, and Mordaunt, turning his back on him, again told him shortly, but with an emotion he could not conceal, of Lucilla's disappearance, of his vain search for her, of the efforts he had made, and their non-result.

Breathless, Rolly listened ; the inference both men drew was obvious. Rolly covered his face under his hands.

'Oh, Mordie, why didn't you take better care of her?' he groaned.

That was Rolly all over, Mordaunt thought bitterly. Why had not *he* taken better care? The ice broken, however, the two men felt better. Mordaunt told Rolly all he had done ; there was nothing further he could suggest. Together they thought over every possible and probable contingency. The problem remained unsolved. Far

into the morning they talked, and they parted friends.

‘I’ll not give up my place on the *Post*, Rolly ; but I can work in some time on *Footlights*. You can rely on me ; I’m glad we’ve had this chat.’

‘You’ll come up to-morrow and see Nettie?’ said Rolly, pausing, hat in hand, at the door.

‘N—o, I think not.’

‘You’d better.’

‘Don’t press it, Rolly. When I think how she flung her in Sinclair Furley’s way, what she said to her, how she spoke to us both that night, I can’t do it. Some day, perhaps, not yet—not until I know what was the end of it.’

‘Poor old Sinclair ! he couldn’t do anybody much harm.’

‘Dirty beast ! By the way, why hasn’t he been writing for you lately ?’

Rolly, with his hat on, came back into the room. He was the irresolute sort of man who always does come back into the room with a forgotten question or answer after he has made his farewell.

‘Why, haven’t you heard ?’

‘No, what ?’

‘Furley has joined the Salvation Army ; goes

about the streets in a red jersey, and a cap like a German band.'

'Anything for an advertisement. I suppose he has the titles of all his shows printed in front of his jersey?'

'No. He got awfully chaffed about Lucilla ; you see, he had boasted, it seems, about her, his intimacy with her, and just at the same time that slashing article against him came out, and he was slated worse than ever. He got hipped over the two things together ; of course, the advertisement may have had something to do with it. Anyway, he wrote to all the papers that he had seen the error of his ways, and had joined the only true Army, with a vague promise that he would write his experiences in the future. Some of them inserted it, and there were a few comments ; not as many as he would have liked, but still some. That is about a month ago, and since then nobody has heard anything of him. I suppose he is really worming himself into their ways, and will give, in a revelation book, 'Experiences of a Showman in the Salvation Army'—not a bad idea, is it? You always had your knife in Sinclair ; I don't know why—he's clever and original.'

‘He is neither one nor the other. You think he is original, because you haven’t seen the French café singers he steals his ideas from. I am glad you’ve got rid of him on the paper; he is the very sort of man that, after a time, no public will stand. I shouldn’t be surprised if he got himself into trouble one day.’

‘Well, don’t let us quarrel about him. I must go now; send me some ‘copy’ for next week, there’s a good fellow. We’re short, as usual; there has been no racing—none of consequence, at least. Ted is getting very shaky in his tips; not a winner for a fortnight.’

‘We must think of something new.’

‘Do; good-night, old man.’

‘Good-night.’

He was gone. Mordaunt went to bed feeling lighter-hearted and happier. Rolly had cared, after all, for the girl’s fate; he was not utterly heartless. Mordaunt’s unutterable pity for the girl, who had no one but himself to miss her, or to search for her, was lessened a little by thinking Rolly cared.

He had missed his work on *Footlights* more than he realized, until now that he had it back again. Five years he and Rolly had worked it together; they had fought the uphill battle of a

new paper and had conquered. It was his—or their—creation, and Mordaunt, now that the distaste for the entire set had evaporated, felt something of his old interest revive.

There was, after all, something attractive about the thoughtless, light-hearted set of young men, who lived only in and for the day's pleasure. And there was something attractive about Rolly, when Rolly was sober. His weakness, his emotional ways and impulsiveness, reminded Mordaunt of Lucilla, and therefore Rolly's company became again very desirable to him.

In point of fact, he drifted back very nearly to where he had been before that eventful July day on the river. Very nearly, but not quite; for to Rolly's house, or in Nettie's company, he did not go. And although he worked again, and although he frequented again his old haunts of pleasure, from the Gaiety bar to Romano's, from the Cormorant to the Aquarium, he was not absolutely content, he did not quite lose the sense of his responsibility, nor of his loss.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AND, meanwhile, what of Lucilla ?

Lucilla had rushed out of Mordaunt's room, out of his arms, urged by an instinct for which she had no name. Her cheeks were hot and burning, her heart throbbing loudly and fast. She rushed down the narrow staircase, out into the street ; the night-wind fanned her curls, she pressed her hand to her side, and ran on, on—into the night. She ran on as if she were pursued, and pursued she was, by a dread that had overcome her timorousness, and sent her forth alone to seek shelter in the streets from something more terrible even than the unknown.

She ran on, and ran ever, until her breath failed, until the throbbing in her heart beat time to the throbbing in her head, until the cheeks that had been hot grew hotter, and the dread that she had run from seemed to assume a shape and substance in what she saw around her.

The moon was shining as brightly, was shedding as soft a light, as it had done on the broad river ; and even the stars, in a silver network, gazed down peacefully and clearly.

But on what a scene ! Women—women in brave apparel—shining jewels ; women painted and dyed out of every semblance to humanity. Girls, mothers, grandmothers, talking, laughing shrilly, begging, praying . . . for what ? Silks and satins, rouge and powder, fighting wildly under the quiet stars . . . for what ?

Three or four policemen, furtive smiles on the faces 'neath the helmets, driving these human animals somewhere ; anywhere out of sight and hearing.

' Move on, now ; move on, there ; keep moving, can't you ? '

' Come with us, bobby. That's right, bobby dear. Bobby's drunk to-night ; he shan't come home with me. '

' Never mind, he shan't go home alone. See, what will his missus say when she sees what a nice girl he has brought home with him ? '

' Now then, move on, keep on moving. Why don't you move on ? '

No one heeded the policemen ; they were there

to perform an impossible duty: perhaps they tried to do it.

Laughing young men, white-shirted, were the centres of attraction. They were full of the small change of a coarse chaff; they could even use their stick to keep at bay the tawdry creatures when they came too near, or laid imploring hands on their immaculate linen. And there were old men too in the crowd—men with gray hair and bowed shoulders—and now and again some dreadful woman, painted, golden-haired, gay, would walk away with one of them, clinging to his arm, and her companions would shout:

‘Good-luck to you, Sal.’

How Lucilla was entangled in this crowd she knew not. She heard around vile thoughts put in viler words, she heard the men laughing with the women, and the furtively smiling policeman call out his monotonous:

‘Move on; can’t you keep moving?’

By her side a fair woman, young in years, asked her some foul question. Lucilla could only shrink back and gaze at her with terror-stricken eyes.

‘Are you saved?’

The fair woman turned round quickly, and a

tract was shoved into her hand. She dropped it as if it had stung her.

‘Damn you! now I shall have no luck to-night.’

She pushed angrily away through the crowd.

But the same voice was now in Lucilla’s ear. She turned quickly, put out her hand.

‘Are you saved?’

Two women, with long, blue cloaks, and poke bonnets, strangely incongruous, were working their way among the people, tracts in their hands; quickly they gave one to Lucilla.

‘Are you saved? Have you found salvation?’

‘No, no; I am lost,’ she moaned out, and caught hold of the long cloak.

‘Come to Christ—salvation full and free. Do you love Jesus?’

‘I don’t know, I don’t know! Help me, save me!’

She clung to them, half fainting, while around her the gay crowd laughed and jeered, and chaffed.

‘Do you mean it? Are you in earnest? Do you want to be saved?’ asked the elder of the women quickly, eagerly, and looking into the girl’s face, dropping her sing-song voice and stereotyped phrase.

For answer Lucilla clung to her tighter ; her senses were reeling. Her intense physical nature was feeling keenly the degradation of the touch of those around her ; her instinct taught her the safety of those long blue cloaks.

‘ Take me away, take me away ! ’ was all she could say, for the streets were going round her and the people, and there was a whirring sound in her brain that shut out thought.

‘ We’ll take you, never fear. We’re in the army of the Lord, and we’ve got His rescue work to do. Hold on ; help her, Patience. ’

They began to work their way out of the throng, bearing the half unconscious girl with them, but never ceasing to give away their tracts, never ceasing that question which they hoped would bear fruit, would go deep into some mind and find an answer. They were assailed in their passage with bitter words, with blows even ; feet were put forward to trip them up, and even the white-vested young exquisites, in their double capes and gardenias, did not scruple to add their voices to the general chorus.

They got out of the herd at last, aided, when possible, by the policemen, who had seen enough of their work to respect, at least, its purpose, and

the strength and endurance they brought to bear on it. Got out of the gay, shrieking, half-drunken crowd, into stiller streets, where the moon could assert itself.

Half leading, half supporting Lucilla, they brought her at length to a sort of court, stone paved, which would have been a square, had not its fourth side opened into the streets. Three tall rows of houses, all high, all built of stone; and into one of them, one no different from the rest, they helped the half-sinking girl.

‘Make an effort, child,’ said the captain; ‘it’s a long way up. We’ll help you all we can.’

And help her they did, to good purpose, up the cold stone stairs, five weary flights up.

‘Help her on to the bed.’

They helped her, and she lay there for about half an hour in a curious, physically acute, but mentally barren state, gradually taking more and more interest in her surroundings, gradually noting more exactly each detail of the room she was in.

It was a depôt of the Salvation Army, where the recruits came for three weeks’ practical experience of work under Captain Nelly’s care and

guidance, prior to their admittance into the training-home at Clapton.

The room she lay in was small and narrow, lit by a grated window. There was a bit of worn felt on the floor, a wooden table and three chairs to match—hard, cheap, wooden chairs—and there was another narrow bed besides the one she was on. Opening into this room were two even smaller ones, each with a bed, a washstand, but little else. Such was the entire establishment at No. 4, Newport Buildings, Drury Lane.

The two Salvationists who had brought Lucy here in safety went down on their knees and prayed aloud in colloquial, unpicturesque language, giving thanks for their success in this night's work. Captain Nelly prayed aloud, the other one joining in the refrain, or shouting 'Amen !' or emitting a sort of groan of acquiescence in the words.

And as they prayed, two more women came in, similarly attired—long cloak, big bonnet, with the words 'Salvation Army' printed across them in red letters.

'Any souls, captain?'

'We stormed the citadel, and one soul yielded.'

A glorious victory! We'll sing a hallelujah!
Now then, girls!—

‘On my knees I fall,
Give Thee up mine all;
To comfort live or die—
For my Lord crucify.’

Captain Nelly led the tune; the others all joined in, shouting, clapping their hands, exhibiting every symptom of joyful excitement.

The girl who had been out with Captain Nelly pulled up the skirt of her dress, and showed a great, big, bleeding bruise on her leg, that some brute had given her as she passed. This was the signal for a fresh outburst of song; the excitement increased; they sang:

‘I will be a soldier,
I will volunteer
To fight for Jesus
In the army here.’

And all the time Lucilla lay on the bed with open eyes, watching them and wondering, but never speaking.

After, maybe, an hour of these devotional exercises, they all calmed down. They shook hands and kissed each other, congratulating themselves on the glorious time they had had; great

victory they said, all their ammunition exhausted, meaning they had given away all their tracts. And one enemy conquered ! Poor Lucilla !

Captain Nelly was a short, squat-figured young woman, of between thirty and forty. She had a big head, and her pale hair was cut short ; her face was large and square, colourless : out of it gleamed a pair of light eyes, with a curious sparkle in them. When she prayed they sparkled and lit up her whole face ; when she was not praying they settled down into monotonous accord with her heavy countenance.

The praying and congratulations over, she dismissed the tired recruits to bed, and disposed of Lucilla by asking her if she could get so far as the next room. The girl acquiescing dully—she was still benumbed—Nelly showed her the way, and after a few words joined her and closed the door.

Now these two were alone together—Lucilla, still in her white-flannel river-dress, with the cherished sailor hat, her childish face, and startled expression ; Captain Nelly, the Salvation Army captain.

‘ Well, child, and how long have you been leading this dreadful life ? ’ was the captain’s first

question, giving Lucilla the only chair the room contained, and seating herself on the bed. Captain Nelly had left humanity and its study far behind her in her desperate race for salvation ; she only saw in Lucilla a girl rescued from the streets.

‘Always,’ answered Lucilla simply, thinking of Nettie—Nettie’s words ; contrasting them with what she had heard to-night from the woman before her.

‘Shocking, shocking ! but the Lord has wonderful ways with the heart ; He led you to us at last. But tell me who first led you astray ; tell me all about the life you have led,’ eagerly.

Captain Nelly was a good woman according to her lights, and leading souls to Christ was her sole occupation in life, bringing the Gospel down to those who would not look up for it, forcing those who shut their ears to open them and hear. But Nelly, who had trodden down all interests but this, as her sect demanded—who, in accordance with their laws, read no newspapers, looked in no shop windows, took no relaxation from her work, had abandoned without a sigh her friends and her relations—had forgotten in the general holocaust of self to sacrifice up her feminine curiosity.

Nelly had never been married ; she had passed

through childhood right up the tragic stream of ugly girlhood, ugly womanhood, longings for she knew not what, discontent, unhappiness, repining, and, at last, into the safe harbourage of a religious enthusiasm, where her energies found outlet, and the passion that might have turned domestic had changed instead into an hysterical fervour of love for Christ.

She meant well, she lived well, she lived a blameless life, dashed with the excitement of monster meetings, glorified by the wounds she received in battle (such as the bruises shown to-night), made full by her work and by her belief in it ; but for all her blamelessness of life, for all her earnest goodness of purpose, she tortured Lucilla to-night as through all her misery the girl had never before been tortured, made her suffer as she had never before suffered, took from her finally, and for ever, her ignorance of sin and her purity of thought.

Lucilla sat at first on the chair and tried to answer the questions that her rescuer put to her ; questions as to the life she led. She did not know Nelly was under a misapprehension, she did not know to what she was acceding when she answered ‘ Yes.’ But Nelly does not come from a mealy-

mouthed clan, nor from one who treat things lightly, or from the surface.

Lucilla was asked about things of which she had never heard, told of crimes that horrified her, explained everything in a manner that turned her sick and faint with fear and terror.

If, trembling and terrified, she answered ‘No’ to some question she could not grasp, the dangers she had escaped were pointed out to her in words whose meaning was so plain that she could not fail to understand. She sank on her knees and buried her face in her hands as Nelly went on praying with her and cross-examining her, exhorting her to change her mode of life, to turn aside while there was yet time, before Jesus had put His finger on her, as Cain was branded for another sin.

As the dreadful night wore on, and the fanatical woman, abandoning rest, gave herself up to the task she thought God had set her of rescuing this child ; she worked herself up into a fervour of hysterical excitement, drawing a fearful picture of a life of profligacy, dwelling on its physical, as well as on its moral, degradation ; alternately sinking on her knees and shrieking to Jesus to save this soul, praying, singing, shouting, with her eyes blazing, and her dull, square face working, waving her

arms, rocking herself to and fro, appealing, praying, until Lucilla, still mentally weak from the shock of her fainting seizure, sick and terrified, caught some of the hysteria, and joined her voice in prayer to the God to whom she had never before prayed to rescue her from a life that she had not even commenced to lead.

The morning dawned into that little narrow room, its bareness cold in the struggling light, and on to these two, with red faces and wild eyes, crying aloud for salvation: Nelly calling out to Jesus to come down and help Lucilla—Lucilla joining in her prayers and entreaties; Nelly's fervour growing greater and greater, and the child's working up with her, until, more like maniacs than sane persons, they shrieked and stamped and gesticulated, standing up and flinging up their arms as if to clasp Him, kneeling down with their faces buried as if to hold Him, until at last nature, unheeded so long, asserted her sway, and half unconscious, swooning, fainting, they fell down in their places on the floor, and passed gradually into the dreamless sleep of exhaustion.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE next morning Nelly, after dismissing the recruits to their daily work, took Lucilla, more numbed, more quiescent than ever, to the Rescue Home of the Salvation Army at Clapton.

They talked but little on the way. Captain Nelly was suffering from the reaction of the over-excitement of the night before ; she had gloried too much over her victory over sin, her capture of a soul. Vanity had entered and shut out God, and she repented. She thought that at the next 'holiness' meeting she would come out into the hall and kneel on the penitent form, and of how the brothers and sisters would come to her, and, with their arms about her, would comfort her, and remind her of where she could find absolution. And she would receive a fresh consecration, and prayers would be offered up aloud for her, and then the drums would sound and the band would play, and the red-jerseyed soldiers clap their hands and shout at the victory over self.

As for Lucilla, last night and the days before, and Mordaunt and Nettle, were all fading pictures. A throbbing in her temples, a surging in her ears, and above all, a remembrance and a terror outweighing all else, born of that pressure on the head she had heard him complain of, kept her silent and Marius-haunted during the journey.

At length they reached the Refuge. It is a low house, old, with a long garden behind it, where once were trees and greensward, but now are clothes lines with washing hung therefrom. As they entered the door a close smell penetrated their nostrils, and the girl turned yet paler. The hall was bare and narrow, not over clean ; opening into it were two rooms. Captain Nelly led the way into the first, a barely-furnished tiny office. A big book in which entries were made lay on the desk. Terrible histories these entries showed. There was no one in the room, and Nelly opened the book and turned over the leaves with curiosity.

‘Ah,’ she said, ‘there was hope for these. Listen to this,’ she read out a few terrible lines. ‘I knew her. She got beautifully saved here ; she’s in respectable service now, and getting her sixteen pounds a year,’ reflectively. ‘I must go and find

the officer in charge, though I won't leave you alone ; you'd best come with me.'

Nelly was afraid her capture might escape. It is not unusual for girls entering these places for the first time to 'shy' at the restraint, or change their mind about their conversion.

They went into the next room. It was full of girls and women : two of them had babies in their arms—wizened, dreadful babies. They were all knitting ; the whirr of the machines joined the other sounds in Lucilla's head. The matron was superintending, but at the moment of their entry the clock chimed twelve ; the matron, an anxious-looking, pock-marked woman, rose.

'Ten minutes' private prayers!' she announced. The machines stopped as if by magic ; down on their knees went all these outcasts, and hid their faces in their hands. God alone knew which of them prayed, or where their thoughts wandered, but they had their chance. And the quieting of the machines comforted Lucilla a little. She, too, knelt and covered her face.

When the ten minutes were over, the matron went outside with Nelly, and heard when, where, and how Lucilla was found. And then these two good women gossiped a little—a religiously inter-

jected gossip of the horror of the lives these girls led, and a little Salvation Army gossip ; for the barracks are in Clapton, and it was an open secret that ‘Mother,’ the superintendent of them, was about to wed one of the commissioners.

This gossip was a rest from their labours—all they ever had of recreation ; for from the religion of the Salvation Army all entertainments but ‘variety’ prayer-meetings are strictly prohibited.

Meanwhile Lucilla was left alone with these twenty or thirty girls and women—refugees of the London streets ; left with them and classed with them.

They asked her questions ; her blue eyes, fever-stricken and anguish-haunted, gazed at them wide open.

‘I don’t know, I don’t know,’ that was all the answer she gave. Mordaunt’s heart would indeed have sunk could he have seen his darling thus ; but there was no one to help her, and the pressure on her head grew worse.

Well, the matron returned. She told Lucilla to fall into rank with the others ; to-day she was too busy to attend to her, to-morrow she would be examined and helped.

Downstairs, when they went to dinner, Lucilla

began again to turn faint and sick, for the illness that was coming upon her sharpened to agony-point her senses of taste and smell. But she was able to go through the routine of the day ; to watch them washing, to watch them knitting, to kneel with them for private prayer ; to listen with them to an exhortation, very broad, to God to guard them from relapsing into vice.

At last the day was over. She went to bed. Her bed was in a room with four others, narrow pallet-beds, each with its red counterpane, with the words 'Salvation Army' engrained in it, and the Salvation Army motto, 'Blood and Fire,' in the centre.

To undress before all these women, to get into one of these little beds, to sleep with one of these terrible counterpanes pressing on her—Lucilla could not do it. She looked wildly around her for some means of escape.

She made a sudden rush to the door, but some hand was put out to stop her.

'I must go, I must go !' she gasped, poor child, knowing not where.

'I felt like that when I first came,' said a large-eyed skeleton of a girl, looking at her with something like pity, but standing, nevertheless, between her and the door. 'It's a dog's life, the working

and the praying, but it's better than the other. You're younger than me. Stay a bit ; they won't let you go if they can help it. She'll catch you as you go out. Best stay ; you'll get used to it. We'll go out together when I get stronger.' She put her hand to her side ; the exertion of speaking brought out that dreadful hollow cough. ' Best stay.'

' They'll nurse you if you're ill,' said another, who looked as if she wanted nursing.

' Let her go!' shouted a third. ' Don't keep her from the streets ; I'll go with you, my girl, I'm sick of this. The streets and publics, they're more cheerful. Out we'll go, this very night ; they can't keep us.'

Lucilla's wild appeal for freedom had aroused the drowsing instincts in this unreclaimed one. She made a rush to the door, seizing Lucilla's arm and dragging her with her, but Lucilla shrank back.

' No, no!'

' Oh, I ain't good enough for you, I ain't.' She turned round, her coarse features inflamed with passion. ' Well, you just shall come ; we'll see about that.'

She seized her by the waist, her hot breath was on Lucilla's cheek, her face so near that the eyes

seemed touching her ; but yet it was the breath that did it, that encompassed her, and stifled her, and prevented her breathing.

She did not see the other girls interfering, dragging away the harridan ; she did not see the matron, roused by the noise, enter the room. She saw nothing but ‘ blood and fire ! ’ with a hot breath fanning her cheek, and stopping her breath as it came, until her life was stopping with it, and she felt as if she must struggle for life, and room for breathing, until she must shriek . . . for breath . . . for space . . . for life.

And shriek she did, and foam at the mouth, and her sweet, slender form was convulsed as she rolled on the bare floor of that poor room, her nails dug into the tender flesh of her hand-palms, writhing and biting the dust, with her fair hair dishevelled, and the unanswered appeal of the blue eyes changed into terror and wild animal pain.

Poor Lucilla ! Her birthright came to her in hideous form.

But she was with Christians. Unbelievers, Atheists, Agnostics, Reason-worshippers, must grant them that this religion they practise is a brotherhood of self sacrifice.

It was a terrible night in the Refuge. The

spirit of revolt against decency and order, roused by the war-cry of Lucilla's assailant, spread rapidly in the congenial soil of the Home.

The matron saw with bitterness one by one of these lambs she thought she had led back to the fold become wolves again, untamed. She heard language that fell on her like reproaches, in that she had taught them no better ; sentiments that appalled her, insomuch as they seemed to show her a year of wasted teaching, wasted prayers. And through it all, through the girls struggling to get away from the Home, and the women struggling to hold them back, through broken discipline, and disorder, and hopelessness, Lucilla's terrible epileptic cry and writhing form had appealed to all her womanliness and feeling.

This band of workers in unprofitable vineyards have a commander-in-chief ; and in sheer despair she was sent for. At length she came. The great Evangelist, and the light and fire about her, subdued the girls and quieted the women.

Then she saw Lucilla, and at a glance decided that the Home, with its inflammable material, and smouldering elements, was no place for her to be nursed back from this acute nerve-storm, through which her womanhood must evolve.

She did — Mrs. General Booth — what few women would have done. She took the struggling, shrieking, epileptic home with her, carrying her into the cab, carrying her from the cab into the house — that unpretending private house in Clapton — where dwelt the brains of the Salvation Army.

When Lucilla awoke, to find herself strangely weak, with all power and energy faded from her, she was in bed, some kind woman was by her side ; there was no trace to tell her how or why she had come there. This terrible convulsion they had seen her pass through they did not mention to her. She had not the complicating misery in her weakness that the revived spirit of Marius would have evoked. The fit had left her very weak, very feeble, in mind and body. Unquestioningly she took the care and the attention, but not ungratefully.

These strangers, who had taken her in, nursed her tenderly, went about their day's work unweariedly, and spent the night watching by her sick-bed ; grudged themselves meat that she might have strong beef-tea, spared themselves what little comforts they had so that she might have jellies, and cool grapes, and custards.

In this household, self-sacrifice was as much a law of daily use and necessity as pleasure-seeking had been at 200, Southampton Row. They ate meat three times a week, and tea and bread on the other days ; they spared from their own substance to give to the poor around them, and to spread the work which seems to them so vital and so immediate. And now that there was a stranger within their gates they managed to spare yet more—mother, daughters, sons, gladly giving up their time to nurse her through her illness, and esteeming such sacrifice no sacrifice in that they did it in the name of the Lord.

And their sacrifices and their lives inspired others. The doctor that came to see her accepted no fee from any member of the army. He had watched them at their work, and he knew the motives by which they were led. His connection with them, the aid he had given them in exposing some foul places in our civilization, had once nearly ruined both his reputation and his practice.

His name had stood high among his medical brethren, his voice had been heard on many a council board. He did not go all the way with the fervent religionism of the sect, he did not argue on the matter of religion at all ; but he

took his stand on what he knew of the life and aims of the leaders of the movement, and when they had come to him, knowing him for a good man, and said to him: 'We want a man—a man known in some other world than ours—to do a deed for us that we cannot do ourselves, to prove that there is a foul blot on our humanity, and by proving help to erase it: will you be the man?' Dr. Strawood-Jones never hesitated, although he knew what acquiescence meant to him. The point was proved. He accepted the censure of a narrow judge, of a timorous professional clique; he went on doing his duty bravely and steadily, and he lives to prove that conscience is a surer guide than popular clamour.

Under his care—and she could have had none better than the Salvation Army doctor—Lucilla slowly struggled back into life and consciousness, though the attack had left her feeble in mind as in body, ready to catch at anything that should be as a support to her weakness.

Her old life began to seem to her dream-like and unreal. She had seen nothing in it but a constant craving for pleasure, a living in the present, with no thought for any to-morrow but a same to-morrow. She had seen Marius die,

but the death of the idiot boy had awoke in her no deep sense of what death meant. There was no bright intelligence to be quenched, or beaming eye to be dulled ; no tears, prayers, regrets for Marius. But now death, an 'unsaved' death, was presented to her in a new light, as she lay weak, but recovering, on her little bed. A terrible picture was drawn for her, one from which she shrank appalled. To be delivered from which she prayed with them, shrinking and cowering in terror when the night came on. But all the time she was told, she was taught, that if she were 'saved,' that is, if she believed as they believed, took Jesus as they took Him, as her Lord and intimate, leaning on Him as a personal friend, fear would pass away from her, and that from which she shrank in terror would be to her as a joy to be looked forward to.

It is easy to picture her mental state. As she lay there, sometimes alone—for even for her they could not neglect their other duties, the thousands of other unsaved souls waiting for them—she thought of these people, and all they had done for her.

They had taken her from the streets. She was no longer ignorant of what that meant ; no

innocence is allowed in the Salvation Army ; all things are spoken of by their right names—sin is called sin broadly, and its consequences here as well as hereafter, physical, as well as moral, specified. Regardless of what depth it may have been from, they had taken her in ; she had been ill, they had nursed her.

Not strong-minded by nature or education, she saw these things, and she saw no further. Whenever she thought of her old life, of her father's home, which was Nettie's home, she could not but feel there was no more any place in it for her. Whenever she thought of the people she was with—of Captain Nelly, who had rescued her ; of Mrs. Booth, who had nursed her ; of Doctor Strawood-Jones, who had doctored her, she was seized with a very spasm of gratitude. And what could she do for them in return ? Nothing ; they asked nothing from her, they wanted nothing from her, but that she should subscribe to their doctrines, believe as they believed.

If she only could ! It seemed to her it was a beautiful religion, and they who preached it led beautiful lives. She heard of Christ and of His sacrifice, and of His power to save.

She thought of nothing but this belief, that

somehow she had not got, as she lay slowly crawling back into life and strength. And she prayed for it day and night, night and day. And she had other visitors, but all one way of thinking.

‘Are you saved? God bless you, my dear; if you could only get salvation, what a happy girl you’d be!’ was the text that came to her from all sides; and wanting peace, yearning for it, what wonder that she tried to obtain the salvation they all told her of?

They have a human, personal way of praying, these Salvation Army people. To many ears it sounds blasphemous; but that was not the view of it Lucilla took. It is hard to have to write of the association of ideas such methods of praying produced in the girl’s mind; impossible to trace the thought-cycle. But as she learnt to pray as they did, with a personal fervour, so in her weakness the fervour, as it passed away, left her possessed by Mordaunt’s image, that until then had been faint. Her cheeks would be dyed in darkness by the remembrance of him, and why she had left him; she would long for him in his strength and his manliness with all the power of her being; he would come between her and her

prayers. That one passionate kiss she had given him became mingled with all the passion of their religion, keeping her unsatisfied. She battled against this, feeling it wicked ; but in the end conquered that emotion ; and the praying and fervour became almost necessary to her.

She recovered sufficiently to go out, and the occasion being propitious, they were able to take her to a monster meeting. She went with them, she sat with them—the priests and priestesses of the religion—on the platform. They went as to a great feast, fasting beforehand, pitying her tenderly in that she could not enjoy it with them ; and their tenderness and their pity moved her, and her throat was full of sobs, and her eyes of tears.

She wept, and, to hide her tears, knelt when they knelt, and sobbed with her face in her hands.

Then the soldiers of the Cross marched into the hall in their bright red jerseys, playing their loud-sounding brass instruments, followed by a crowd they had attracted from the outside. They played, and suddenly the vast congregation lifted up their voices and joined in the song—

‘ I am a Christian soldier,
One of a noisy crew ;
I shout when I am happy,
And that I mean to do.

‘Some say that I’m too noisy—
I know the reason why—
And if they felt the glory
They’d shout as well as I.

Chorus.—‘I’m a soldier ;
Should you want me,
You can find me
In the Salvation Army.’

‘They sing and shout in heaven,
It is their hearts’ delight ;
I shout when I am happy,
I shout with all my might.

‘I’ve Jesus Christ within me,
He’s turned the devil out ;
And when I feel the glory
It makes me sing and shout.

Chorus.—‘I’m a soldier,’ etc.

The enthusiasm spread from the platform to the hall, men clapped their hands and shouted, women joined their voices, one and all singing and calling out—

‘I’ve Jesus Christ within me,
He’s turned the devil out,’ etc.

They sang and shouted, and they clapped their hands. Weak with illness, dazed by long kneeling and by fasting, Lucilla heard the acclaims around her.

Suddenly the song ceased, the music stopped,

there was silence in the hall. Mrs. Booth rose in her place.

‘Brothers,’ she said simply, and as she spoke she laid a hand on Lucilla’s head, ‘there is a poor soul trying to struggle into light. Can you help? God bless this meeting; if we can win even this one soul, the meeting is blessed. What shall we do for her?’

‘Pray for her!’

‘Sing for her!’

‘Shout for her!’

‘Clap hands for her!’ . . . ‘Jesus will hear!’ resounded on all sides.

Mrs. Booth sank on her knees and set the example. All followed this—

‘Hark! the voice of Jesus calling,

“Come, ye laden, come to Me;

I have rest and peace to offer—

Rest, thou wretched one, for thee.

Take salvation—take it now, and happy be!”’

Gradually the congregation and their leaders worked themselves up further and further into a spiritual frenzy bordering upon delirium. The instruments were clanged and the drums beaten. They called on Jesus to come down and help them; they shook themselves about on their knees in their places.

‘Sinner, heed the gracious message,
To the Blood for refuge flee ;
Take salvation—take it now,
And happy be ;’

and poor Lucilla, hearing them, longing for the rest and peace, yearning to feel as they felt, to shout and be happy . . . yielded.

‘Is it coming? is it coming?’ they asked.

‘I see a light!’ she whispered faintly, and indeed a thousand stars seemed dancing before her dazzled eyes.

Mrs. Booth caught the words.

‘She sees a light, brothers and sisters! she sees a light!’

‘Glory, glory, hallelujah! Hurray! Bravo, Jesus! I knew He could do it. I knew He was at this meeting. She’s got it; she’s got salvation! God bless you! God bless you!’

‘We are Christian soldiers,
We’re a noisy crew ;
We shout when,’ etc.

It was a glorious meeting; afterwards they all shook hands with one another and wept and laughed aloud, and crowded round Lucilla with congratulations and a colloquial rhapsody that might almost be called religious chaff; such as

‘Didn’t we tell you so, eh? Didn’t we say He could do it? Ha, ha! you’ve got Him now, and no mistake!’ The girl was overcome with gratitude and thankfulness; she was going to be happy, she put away the misgivings; they were all so happy, and she *had* seen a light. . . .

Mrs. Booth led her from the hall, and she did not know what a splendid collection was the result of her sudden salvation, so had it worked upon the people.

She did feel happy at first, as they caressed and rejoiced over her when they went home. And the General was there, too, the first time she had seen him, for he had been away on a foreign mission, and he was told of the collection, and of the enthusiastic meeting, and he, too, rejoiced in a fatherly way over her; and at last she felt she had a family, a home, a purpose in life.

CHAPTER XX.

CONVERSION accomplished, work and discipline began, and Lucilla very gratefully yielded implicit obedience. Orders from headquarters were that she was to have six weeks in the Training Home, and then to repair to London to work in the very field whence she had herself been plucked. Strange, her spirits did not sink at the notion. Her conversion was very recent. She would comfort herself with its newness, and the hope held out by her companions that she would feel more and more the nearness of Christ. Just at present she rested on the fact that she had got 'salvation,' drawing ease from the satisfaction she was expected to feel.

Salvation Hall, the Training Home, is an imposing building, situated at the end of a wide *cul-de-sac*. It is a divided building, one half for men, one half for women. It bears its title boldly in prominent letters, and beneath them the motto, 'Blood and Fire.'

Lucilla entered, was presented with a uniform, was, as it were, given the freedom of the guild. The routine of the life was told her; she was shown her bedroom. The bedrooms are curious. In a large, high room, two rows of cubicles are erected, with one partition running along between them. The effect can be likened to nothing more exactly than the stalls erected for animals exhibited at cattle-shows. In each stable, or cubicle, there is a narrow bed, two texts and a Bible; the washing apparatus is outside.

In the Training Home were collected together twenty or thirty young women, ranging perhaps from sixteen to thirty, drawn mostly from the ranks of middle-class life, daughters of professional men, lawyers, architects and clergymen.

Girls who have 'got religion' suddenly by a revelation, or girls whose dull provincial life had led them always to religion as a pastime, but who had found in the music and excitement of the Army that something resembling dissipation which their spiritual lives had hitherto lacked. Some of them had been good daughters to widowed mothers; but 'Christ had called,' and, forsaking home and all natural ties, they had left those homes desolate and those mothers childless, and had gone out at the

call, glorious martyrs to religion. There were even two or three young wives, who had left their husbands and their children at this same call. And all these young hysterical, religious-mad young women, thrown together, acted and reacted upon one another, under the extraordinary régime in which they were placed, until there were times when, instead of a religious assembly, an outsider might well imagine himself in some new and strangely managed institute for neurotics.

The superintendent, called 'Mother' by the inmates, a highly-strung, delicate young woman, did her best to foster this spirit. The idea in taking these girls into a training-home is to teach them to conduct a meeting. 'Conducting a meeting' means simply working it up into that stage of excitement in which reason is entirely overcome and feeling exerts its unlimited sway. To be able to move a meeting, then, is a much-prized quality; but it demands first the power of being personally moved.

Lucilla had had a fit of nervous excitement; it had been followed by a violent epileptiform seizure. Brain-weak, full of thoughts of Mordaunt as she had been for months past, full as the heart of a young girl can hold of love for him, bearing

about with her now the knowledge that this love was evil, the passionate religionism of the sect appealed to her, and seemed to set her free to love.

The girl was no hypocrite, although difficult to understand. She knelt with her companions, prayed with her companions, fixed her mind, as she was told to do, on Jesus, His love and care for her.

Down on her knees, her eyes hidden, she would think of Him as King and Comforter, and pray. But her introspection was not deep or searching. She prayed to the Spirit of love and gentleness and kindness, and only one had been kind and gentle to her.

So she lived out her six weeks, growing stronger, going through an extraordinary mental phase, feeding her heart and mind on love, going through religious exercises, but absolutely, although she did not know it, untouched by religion.

But one day, the time of probation being over, she was sent out to sell the *War Cry* in the streets. It is generally the first work entrusted to a recruit; by their success their fitness for further work is demonstrated.

Lucilla, grown into womanhood, looked never more beautiful than now, and even the unbecoming

costume could not disguise it. The short-cropped golden hair persisted in curling, and the little rings would lie on the forehead under the shadow of the big bonnet. Level brows and blue eyes, complexion fair and pale, lips soft, full, glowing red. The bonnet would be pushed back from the white forehead, and opening the sweet mouth she would cry, '*War Cry*, sir? *War Cry*?' and would push it into the hands of a passer-by. She never went out without hoping that she would meet Mordaunt; she never went home without feeling that the next day might bring her that supreme moment. And yet her nature, childish still, although her emotions had grown to womanhood, kept her passive and obedient to orders, docile and attentive to her duties.

But one day, as she went out as usual to sell, an incident occurred. It was November; it was semi-dusk, and as the girls turned out, six of them, to tramp about the streets, six men on similar duty issued from the other side of the building. Even in the Salvation Army girls are girls, and men are men.

The two little processions stopped; they began to talk; they split into pairs. Lucilla found by her side a man red-jerseyed, sloping shouldered, the Army cap slipping far over his narrow forehead.

‘It is more interesting, it is more picturesque, if we work together,’ said a voice beside her.

She started at the voice in the dusk ; she looked up ; their eyes met.

‘Good God !’

‘Mr. Furley !’

‘But how, but why——’ He was bewildered, incoherent.

‘Don’t tell anybody.’

‘How I have longed for you !’

‘You ?’

‘Yes, I ; when you left me, when you preferred an empty-headed Philistine like Mordaunt Rivers to me, life was valueless. I joined the Salvation Army.’

‘When I preferred Mordaunt . . . ’ she stammered.

‘When you went to live with Mordaunt. I am no purist ; everyone must do as he likes, it is no one else’s concern ; I don’t believe in immorality. But you had encouraged me to think you mine. I had thought of you as mine, and talked of you as mine. You behaved very badly to me.’

‘I never thought of you,’ she said cruelly—Sinclair’s presence and Sinclair’s words reminding

her of Mordaunt, torturing her with Mordaunt's absence. 'I never went to live with Mordaunt.'

'You left Southampton Row with him.'

'Yes.'

'Where did you go with him?'

'I ran away from him.'

Her voice had such a sound in it ; could it be she was regretting that running away?

'When?'

'At once.'

'The night you left home?'

'Yes.'

'And joined the Salvation Army?'

'Yes.'

'What did Mordaunt say?'

She burst into tears. 'I don't know, I don't know ; I have never seen him since.'

She longed for him in that moment ; she had no pride in that moment ; she wanted him desperately.

Sinclair and she walked along side by side, to passers-by an uninteresting couple — a Salvation lassie and her comrade, two importunate *War Cry* sellers.

But Lucilla was abroad on a sea of passion, and

Sinclair was thinking how pleasant an episode this might prove to him.

Already he was tired of the Salvation Army. He had joined it 'to be talked about,' but now he wanted to get back to the world, and enjoy the conversation and comment he had foreseen. But Lucilla Lewesham was here, and if it were all true that she had told him—if, indeed, she had left Mor-daunt Rivers as she had said—how gloriously it would add to his re-entry! His reputation as *un homme galant* would indeed be assured when it got about that Lucilla had been with him in the Army.

Lucilla's emotion subsided. She had been for some time now out of the reach of all intellectual companionship. Her mental food had been *War Crys* and *Little Soldiers*. Literature and journalism had been strangers to her, all topics but religion banned and barred. She turned to Sinclair Furley with interest once she had recovered from the shock of seeing him. She asked him eagerly for news of her father, of Nettie, of *Foot-lights*.

'And how did your show succeed?'

'My show? Oh, my show! Do you remember when I described that scene where she was in the

boudoir waiting for him, and he was in the garden, and dancing with glee at the thought of her prolonged expectation! It was an extraordinary scene. Ha, ha!' he laughed, this Salvationist soldier, 'it has never been done before. It took, you know; it was very widely noticed.'

'The show was a success, then?' she asked with interest.

'Well, you know. . . . What is success? It is not popular, it does not suit the bourgeois mind, and it is the bourgeois who make popularity. I don't want to be popular; if a show of mine becomes popular I know I have failed. Originality is never popular.'

'Oh,' said Lucilla. 'But was it well criticised?'

'Criticised!' with scorn. 'What are criticisms? Bubbles!' He snapped his fingers. 'They don't live. Who will read criticisms in ten years' time? By the way, though, the *Unfurled* had a very good notice; they have a very intelligent man on the *Unfurled*.'

'I thought you used to write for it,' said Lucilla innocently.

He blushed.

'I? Oh no; I don't write for it any longer. Perhaps I shall again when I leave this.'

He rattled his bundle of *War Crys*, and offered one to a little servant-girl with a beer-pot in her hand.

‘You are not going to stay?’

‘No, no! Why, really, it is too absurd; the knee-drill, and the penitent form, and the band. But I shall use it; it is picturesque: the Sunday-morning marches through country lanes, with bands playing, and flags flying, and the brown-skinned children with their wondering eyes coming out to listen. It is very picturesque. It will make a play.’

‘But,’ she asked him timidly, ‘you are saved? you found salvation here? you are happy now about your soul?’

‘Ha, ha!’ laughed the dramatist. ‘Ha, ha, ha! ’pon my word, that is very funny! I shall use that.’

Lucilla was silent. She had not meant to be funny; but now that he had laughed, the incongruity of Sinclair Furley and salvation struck her, and she pondered over it as they walked home together, and although Sinclair talked on, she did not heed him much.

When they were within a few streets of the Home, Sinclair stopped:

‘Give me your *War Crys*,’ he asked, holding out his hand for them. ‘I always leave them here.’

‘Where?’

She withheld hers, looking around her in astonishment.

They were alone in a little narrow Clapton street ; they were standing on the pavement. It was cold, it was late, and they had not disposed of one of their papers.

‘Here.’ He pointed to a grating—a sewer-grating in the gutter of the road. ‘I plant mine here. Sow the good seed ; ha, ha, it is well manured ! Let me put yours there, too ; count them first ; I must know how many pennies to refund.’

She held her *War Crys* tight.

‘It is very wicked ; you are a hypocrite ! I will not put my *War Crys* there.’

CHAPTER XXI.

HE could not persuade her to obtain a good name as a soldier by such means ; there was nothing mean or underhand about Lucilla. She felt her old repulsion for Sinclair returning.

‘You will meet me at the same time to-morrow ?’ he said, holding her hand as they parted.

His hand, soft, boneless, damp, pressed hers.

She ran off without answering.

But that night, on her knees, her thoughts were confused ; the beautiful harmony was gone. She could not pray. She listened to the talk around : all of Jesus, and of salvation, of ambition for the saving of souls, and of thanksgiving for personal sanctification.

She went to her narrow bed miserable, unhappy. Did she believe ? Did she not believe ? What had Sinclair done to her, or what had his laughter done for her, that she could no longer pray ? She passed a miserable night, feeling like a hypocrite ;

and a miserable morning, full of prayers she could not join in, gratulation she could not share.

It was after dinner that 'Mother' used to exhort these young soldiers. Lucilla thought she would wait until then and speak to her, and tell her her new doubts and troubles; for she felt that in 'Mother' belief was living and real. But the girl was very shy of speaking of her feelings, very reluctant of dissection—so shy, indeed, of speaking of herself, that she had never even corrected the false impression that had been created about her by Captain Nelly's capture of her.

Lucilla assisted in clearing away the dinner—took her turn in the washing-up. They did all the menial tasks by turns, as a discipline, and in that vast barrack of a building the work was not light. Then nervously she went on her knees in the room where the trestle-tables had been removed, and only the benches ranged in order remained.

Twenty or thirty girls on their knees, in an absolute silence; the large white-washed room, text-hung, echoing a pin-sound. 'Mother' entered: with her, her lieutenant.

'We will commence by a hymn—number 172,' she said, opening the little red hymn-book of the Army. 'Sing it standing.'

‘ Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow Thee :
Naked, poor, despised, forsaken,
Thou from hence my All shalt be.
Perish every fond ambition,
All I’ve sought, or hoped, or known,
Yet how rich is my condition—
God and heaven are still mine own !
‘ Let the world despise and leave me,
They have left my Saviour too ;
Human hearts and looks deceive me,
Thou art not like them, untrue ;
Men may trouble and distress me,
’Twill but drive me to Thy breast ;
Life with troubles hard may press me,
Heaven will bring me sweeter rest.’

They sang this ‘all together, passionately,
‘ Mother ’ leading. After each verse they sang
as a chorus, their voices rising higher and higher :

‘ At Thy feet I fall,
Give Thee up my all.’

‘ All together. Now, then, sing it again ! All
who feel it hold up the right hand ; all who feel it
with all their hearts hold up both hands. Sing it
so, with both hands up. Make a joyful noise
before the Lord ! Laugh !

“ Men may trouble and distress me,
’Twill but drive me to Thy breast ;
Life with troubles hard may press me,
Thou wilt give me sweeter rest.”

Now sing it clapping your hands. Once more ; we will have it once again !'

She clapped her hands, and they joined her, keeping time as their shrill young voices rose to heaven.

Such an earnest-faced young woman, with a sweet, penetrating voice that went straight to her hearers. When, excited by the noise and the sound of their own voices, and the emotions with which the words had touched them, she arose to address them, they were all on fire. She knelt down after they had finished singing, and prayed aloud for them. She prayed that their hearts might cleave to Jesus, and their souls might be full of love for Him ; that the love might overflow all other feelings, and drive out all other thoughts ; that they would give up everything for their love, sacrifice on the altar all of self ; that they might cling to Him, and let the precious blood wash over them, and never loose their hold, but walk with Him, holding His hand and doing His commands. Then she begged them, for His sake, to go out and fight ; not to be ashamed of their love, or to hide it, but to be always ready to talk of it, and to teach others the glory of it.

Then, suddenly as she had knelt, she arose to her feet, and, with eyes upturned to the ceiling, sang dramatically:

“ We’re marching on to war, we’re marching on to war ;
We care not what the people think nor what they say we
are.
We mean to fight for Jesus, and His salvation bring ;
We’re blood-and-fire soldiers, and we’re fighting for the
King.”

‘ Be good soldiers, real blood-and-fire soldiers, always on the war-path ; ready with your bombardment, your testimony of what this overpowering love has done for you. I want you to grow into real hallelujah captains, and your work be blessed.’

She prayed then that the ‘ slain of the Lord might be counted in thousands through them ;’ and she prayed so fervently, so feelingly about them, that their hearts were moved, and their tears ran down their cheeks, and they longed for the fighting and the battle—for the day when they might go out from the Home, be drafted into corps, and lead in the fight as she was leading them.

Suddenly, when all were in tears, all hearts beating for battle, she rose to her feet :

‘ Who will fight for Jesus ?
Who will volunteer
For a lifelong service
In the Army here ?
Who will fight the battle ?
Who will face the strife ?
Who will brave the hardships
Of a soldier’s life ?’

And, as if with one accord, and one voice, they answered with clapping of hands, in loud-voiced harmony.:

‘ I will fight for Jesus,
Year by year, far or near ;
I will be a soldier,
I will volunteer.’

‘ Down on your knees, then.’ They dropped.
‘ Commune with your hearts ; get near to God.
The orders have come ; are you prepared ?’

They prayed silently. Then she rose and addressed them again. She told them their time of probation was over, their sojourn in the Home at an end. Now they must work, each one at her allotted task. Then she told them of the orders from headquarters : how some were to be drafted to one corps, and some to another. Those who were well and soundly saved were to go back to their dwelling-places, that their former comrades might see and follow their examples ;

and as for Lucilla, Lucilla was to go to London, back to Captain Nelly, to work with her, to save such sinners as she had been herself, to show her grateful heart by leading other souls to God and the Army.

And Lucilla's heart, bursting with love, yielded to the influences around her, and she, too, prayed.

The next day saw her installed in the depot in Newport Buildings, sharing a room with a converted sinner from the mining district—a girl who could neither write nor read, but whom the Army had converted, and who was, in their own words, beautifully saved.

But Lucilla had been growing all this time. From the moment she had left Mordaunt, until now, she had been developing from an ignorant, innocent girl into a woman. All the influences around her, so long as they had kept her excited, had kept her satisfied. But now she was no longer satisfied. Praying, fasting, singing, were empty, and life itself was empty. And although she knew not whither the instincts in her were leading, she felt that they were not leading her heavenward.

The brigade she belonged to is what is known as the 'Gutter, Slum, and Garret Brigade.' They

went out in the mornings into the very poorest houses, in the very lowest localities, and introduced the Gospel, instead of offering temporal assistance to the poor wretches whose homes they invaded. At night they went out into the streets, as they had done the night Lucilla had been found.

In this work Lucilla, unbelieving, uncomforted by the faith that they relied on, joined. She went into wretched rooms, where drink and vice lived together; she strove to give away tracts and *War Crys*, she joined in choruses of 'Hallelujah!' she went to Regent's Hall on a Sunday and sang,

' On my knees I fall,
Give Thee up mine all,'

going through all the routine, and making no sign to those around her that the work was distasteful to her. Only one thing there was that she begged to be let off. That was the night-work. It was not that the vice shocked her, but . . . it attracted her.

Not the women, tawdry, coarse, loud-voiced; not the street-life, bad, brazen, bestial; but there was something in these young men in evening-dress, with their flowers—something in

these old men, their refined accent, their gloved hands, even their sneers and their sarcasm—that touched some inner chord of self, and chimed with it in harmony.

When she was in the streets, something there was that rose in her, that attracted, excited, shocked her. She thought constantly of Mor-daunt ; she caught herself always looking round her, expecting to see him. She would go home burning hot, and that heat that came, she knew not whence, rose like a sea of fire between her and heaven, and blotted it out.

CHAPTER XXII.

THEN Sinclair Furley came to see her, and, seeing him, she took a sudden resolve. She would speak to him, she would ask his advice ; she could not go on living like this. He would advise her, he would help her—he who, like her, had known another life.

She was alone in the depot when he came. The others were out on duty ; hers was to prepare dinner for them on their return. Rolly Lewesham's fair daughter, in her Salvation Army dress and bonnet, prepared boiled beef and carrots for Captain Nelly and her recruits !

‘I am glad to see you,’ she said simply, holding out her hand.

‘I could not come before. These absurd restrictions, these crude regulations and arrangements, interfered with me. I have learnt enough now, and I have found you again. I shall give it all up.’

‘You can go back into the world,’ she said wistfully.

‘Oh yes, I must begin my new play ; I must *exploiter* this new religion. It is a good subject ; it has never been done on the stage before.’

It was one of Sinclair’s minor weaknesses to believe his every idea was absolutely original. Yet, as he leaned against the table in his red jersey and peaked cap, he did not give the impression of originality or genius. His narrow, sloping shoulders, his white hands, with their yellow nailtips, looked neither strong nor impressive.

‘And you do not believe?’ she questioned with anxiety.

‘Ha, ha! No, no! I mean to use it like this.’ He was at his best now, serious and superficial. ‘I shall prove that religion is not an instinct, neither is it a fact ; it is a *bad habit!*’

‘A bad habit?’ echoed Lucilla feebly.

‘A *bad habit!*’ he repeated dogmatically, and with emphasis. Emphasis always took the place of argument with Sinclair. ‘I find among all these converts, among all these saved, there have been Methodist or Evangelical fathers, mothers, grandmothers—that the habit has been there, in

the family ; that there has been an enlightenment ; but with temptation, with someone who asks them about their soul, the weakness of the old family taint is exposed, and they relapse into religion—into a sensual abandonment to the idea of a future empty of work or pain.’

‘Sensual?’

‘Certainly. They are all sensualists—ascetic sensualists—their minds taking the place of their bodies.’ Sinclair delighted in antithetical phrases. ‘They talk and think of nothing but love and future ease.’

He talked more on this theme, and Lucilla listened and grew soul-sick.

‘Then, to prove my point,’ he went on, ‘look at you and at me. We are not touched, not convinced ; the habit has never been there : it cannot be created. We went in Bohemian atheists. All the dipping in the fountain of light and of glory leaves us Bohemian atheists ; our birthmarks are not washed out.’

‘Birthmarks of Bohemia?’ questioned Lucilla slowly.

‘Yes, indelible.’

‘Birthmarks of Bohemia!’ The alliterative phrase seized on Lucilla’s fancy, and fastened there.

What was she who had escaped from Southampton Row, fled from her lover's arms, consecrated herself to the service of God? Stamped and birthmarked, and, as the instincts of her womanhood to light and joy rose in her, she felt permeated with the stain that had filtered through her entire system.

Birthmarked! That was why she could not believe; that was why she could not pray; that was why the streets had for her a mysterious fascination, and her heart beat fast, and she thrilled under wanton glances that passed her companions unheeded. It was terrible. And yet there was a compensation in it. If it was her birthmark, then she must yield to it; then she need no longer fight against her instincts nor smother them; then she must . . . There was a light about her.

‘When you hide your face like that, I can just see the nape of your neck; the curve is charming.’

Passionately as she revolted against the thoughts his words seemed to find substance for, she raised her head and looked at him.

‘You talk about my birth-stain, and in the same breath about my beauty! Is corruption beautiful?’

‘In decay there is a charm,’ he began.

‘You can talk and I can think, and in the end there is no foundation and no rest. I am weak,

and the God of these people was strong. I wanted to lean upon them, miserable, despairing as I am. Then you tell me of this taint, and in my soul I feel it, and that there is no salvation for me, and that I do not want salvation, but rather corruption. You have talked down heaven and argued away God. What can you give me instead?’

And there being nothing in him to rise to this appeal, he fell under it.

‘You cannot believe in this God they play the drum to,’ he answered ; ‘you cannot love Christ, the abstraction ; you can love me, the man.’

He advanced to her.

‘No, I cannot ;’ and she shuddered back from him.

‘But,’ he persisted, ‘there is nothing else in the world but this ; it is the meaning of everything, the kernel of art. The love of the man for the woman, of the woman for the man. Religious love is for the ugly : it is the effort of the imagination to feed the senses.’ He did not know he was illogical ; he warmed to Lucilla as he spoke. He loved her as much as such men as Sinclair Furley can love. ‘Human love is for the beautiful.’ He took her hand ; he noted the bare white arms, the sleeves rolled up above the elbow to

allow ease for her cookery operations. A feeble access of passion came over him.

‘And you are beautiful ; really, you are beautiful,’ admiration looking from his dull eyes.

‘I—I,’ she stammered, putting up her hand to pull her bonnet over her face, an involuntary gesture of modesty. The bonnet fell back, hanging to her neck only by its strings. The childish fair face was uncovered.

‘Charming ! charming !’ he said again, his artistic instincts keeping him spell-bound.

So long it was since she had heard a word of love, so love-sick was she for the yearning for love, that even Sinclair Furley’s words and looks brought a glow to her cheeks and an added beat to her breast.

‘I want to kiss you. I have never kissed you,’ he said, as he drew nearer to her. Then, before she could draw back, while still the glow of being once more loved remained on her cheek, he caught hold of her, and his lips touched her cheek in lieu of the quickly averted mouth. Her purity, lost in thought, but still retained in deed, revolted. She drew back. Neurotic, eager, yet the touch of Sinclair Furley chilled and repelled her. She pushed him back from her, and with a smile so weak, so

watery, it might have meant triumph or mortification, he yielded to her.

‘Did you mind?’

She was hot and cold, excited, attracted, repelled; she did not understand her own sensations.

‘I don’t know.’

The deformed femininity of his nature made him glad in her shrinking and obvious fears.

‘You are so charming, so original!’ Again his lack-lustre eyes endeavoured to express his admiration. ‘Do you know I love you?’

‘No, no; you do not love me.’ She put the idea away from her. Was this indeed the love she had been yearning for? ‘You do not love me.’

But the proffered love, the weak caress, the instinct she had felt to accept this love—any love,—showed her, in a terrible instantaneous flash of knowledge, the birth-stain he had told her of.

And then there rushed into her mind the thought of Mordaunt, her lover, from whom she had fled, who had known her pure, modest—who had loved what was best in her. In her falling, in her abasement—for so did her sensitive nature regard this new instinct—she recognised her one conscious gladness was that Mordaunt was not here to see her—that

he did not know the wanton thoughts that arose in her breast for the kisses she had not had, and the arms that had loosed her too soon.

‘I love you,’ said Sinclair Furley. ‘I want to marry you.’

‘Marry—marry you?’ she stammered.

‘Yes, yes. We will leave the Army together, or we might be married in the Army : it would make a great sensation ; it would be in all the papers.’

The idea excited him ; he pressed his suit eagerly.

The picture seized upon him of a platform marriage in Exeter Hall, of the streets placarded with the announcement, of himself in uniform and cap, with the fair Lucilla at his side, the central figure of a large assembly.

Lucilla’s strangely-born adolescence left her no character, but all yearning. She was quivering with fear and self-knowledge. She looked upon herself as vile. That Mordaunt should see her so, should know her so, was her first deadly terror. That she should succumb to the temptation pulling at her heart-strings, that she should be unable to keep from him now all that belonged to him, made her tremble and sick with apprehension.

She did not know her strength in that moment,

nor that her virtue was rising, not falling ; nor that she was more pure now than she had been when she fled from him, unknowing why. She did not know this. She thought that at all risks, at all hazards, she must put a barrier between herself and him ; and all the time she was feeling this so acutely, her weakness, and the strength of her temptation, Sinclair Furley was urging her to marry him.

At length and suddenly, she put out her hand to him, eyes dimmed and cheeks white and drawn.

‘ Yes, I will marry you,’ she said, and submitted to his kisses—to his mucilaginous, soft-skinned personality.

And then they heard the sound of voices on the stairs.

‘ We will march through the world
With the fire and the blood ;
Lord, the power and the glory are Thine.
When we’ve turned guilty sinners
By millions to God,
Like stars in the heaven we’ll shine.’

CHAPTER XXIII.

THAT evening Sinclair, discarding his uniform, went round to Caroni's, where he knew he would find his brother.

Caroni's is a restaurant in the Strand. It was the fashion for the staff of *Footlights* to stroll in of an evening, to commence or finish their process of getting drunk there, to collect their anecdotes, to chaff the ladies who lounged about the portals, and generally to enjoy themselves.

It was early in the evening when Sinclair arrived. Tom was lounging against the counter, endeavouring to derive humour from the somewhat flat operation of 'getting a rise' out of Mrs. Caroni. From such an occupation he turned gladly to his brother.

'Hullo, old man! where is your uniform?'

Sinclair's yellow face was surmounted by a hat like an Italian brigand's. He was ill-dressed in a short coat, with check trousers, and a coloured

handkerchief round his throat. Tom, long, black, and untidy, had reached the point at which untidiness merged into uncleanness.

But they were good friends, these two brothers. Tom was tolerant of his brother's weaknesses, and could not forget the time when, as children, they had gone through scrapes together. Sinclair looked to Tom as his refuge in time of need.

‘I have left the Army.’

‘Left the Army! Dear, dear, what a misfortune for the Army!’

‘Be serious a moment, Tom; I have something to tell you.’

‘Then you must stand me a drink. I can’t listen to any of your stories under a bottle of “the boy.” Here, Beauty! Pommery sec—and hurry up.’

‘You remember Rolly’s daughter?’ commenced Sinclair eagerly, proudly.

‘Your “distinctively virginal” maiden, who bolted with Mordie Rivers?’

‘No, no, she didn’t. Do listen! She has been with me.’

Tom stared at him a moment, then burst out laughing—throwing back his big head, peeling it out heartily and unconstrainedly.

Irritated, and trembling with anger, Sinclair said :

‘What are you laughing at? What are you laughing for? You are growing coarser than ever. Can’t you listen?’

‘Oh, I’m coarse, am I? And Rolly’s daughter preferred you to Mordaunt Rivers? I can’t help laughing; but there, go on, old man, and keep your hair on! I am all attention.’

‘She never was with Mordaunt Rivers—she joined the Salvation Army. We are engaged. I am going to marry her. I shall use her experiences as well as my own: “A Refuge in the Salvation Army.” It will make a splendid play; plenty of singing I can work in, and dancing too. I think I shall take the “Leggeries” for the season, and run it there. It will be a great success.’

‘It is a rotten title,’ said Tom, more frankly than elegantly, staring at his brother curiously. ‘Who on earth cares about the Salvation Army—howling vulgarians! What do you mean about marrying? You are not a marrying man.’

Sinclair flushed.

‘Why should I not marry? there is not any hurry.’

‘You’ve got funny ideas of enjoyment,’ he

answered drily. 'How are you going to support her? I suppose you have been saving money lately?'

'No, no.'

'Well, do you think Rolly is going on keeping you? You could make a living at the singing and dancing, if you'd moderate it a little. Yours is a rum game for a gentleman. I suppose we are gentlemen, by the way; the governor was. And now you are going to marry Mordie Rivers!''

At the moment they heard loud voices in the street, and a knot of men talking in thick and excited voices. The glass-door was burst open, and the whole staff of *Footlights* and their supporters entered.

Ted Smith was drunk; he had a lady on his arm; it was easy to see where he had found her. Two or three girls followed them in; in a moment the whole place was in an uproar. Drinks were called for, and devilled anchovies, and grills of various kinds. The waiters came, and the bustling little Italian proprietor—all was confusion; for the men and women all ordered together, and chaffed the men, and it was impossible to attend to them all as quickly as they desired.

Rolly and Mordaunt Rivers were among the others ; Mordaunt cool enough, Rolly just sufficiently 'on' to be brilliant. Mordaunt leaned against the counter watching the scene. He was commencing to look middle-aged ; there were lines on his handsome face.

'Ha, Rolly ! how are you ? I've been through a remarkable experience since we've seen you—remarkable. I must tell you all about it.'

'Oh, I know. You have been collecting details for a new "Maiden Tribute." They say the Salvation Army got the whole thing up. It will just suit your peculiar style. Here's luck to his new venture, boys.' Rolly seized a glass and tossed it off. He insisted upon drinking Sinclair's health on his return, and he made the temperate realist join him.

The word and the wink passed round were enough. Everyone insisted upon drinking Sinclair's health, and no one would hear of Sinclair refusing the toast. As his weak eyes got bloodshot, as his talk grew thick and more boastful than ever, they redoubled their exertions.

'Make him blind—make him paralytic ; it will do him good,' whispered Rolly.

Tom did not interfere. Tom had a weak-

ness: it was free drinks; he joined in the joke and toasted his brother with the others.

Then the fun grew fast and furious. The women, loud and full, began to joke with Sinclair; and Sinclair, his timidity vanquished by the wine, flattered and overwhelmed, presented a curious picture of excited, yet trembling, weakness.

Mordaunt, who, always with these people, found his level instinctively when he sank to theirs, yet watched the scene with a wholesome disgust.

‘The first lady who has ever loved you, isn’t it?’ he asked Sinclair, with a smile that scarcely concealed his contempt, as one of the miserable creatures flung her arms around Sinclair’s neck, and held the wineglass to his lips.

‘Drink it up, and I’ll kiss you,’ she said; ‘you shall have a kiss for your pluck.’

‘No, no, she isn’t,’ stammered Sinclair, as he drank the liqueur she proffered, and with a leer, made more hideous by his condition, staggered to his feet to claim the promised reward.

‘No, she isn’t,’ he went on with half-drunken gravity; ‘there’s Lucilla, beautiful Lucilla.’

‘Blackguard and liar!’ Mordaunt sprang at him, but Rolly, a man for once, intercepted him.

‘He doesn’t know what he is saying. Leave him alone,’ he said hurriedly.

‘Lucilla ! who’s Lucilla ? Tell us all about her,’ shouted Ted. ‘How she loved you, where she loved you, when she loved you ; spit it out, old man.’

‘No, no, it’s a secret,’ he said with drunken gravity, nodding his head toward Rolly, putting his fingers on his lips ; ‘it’s a secret. I know where she is, ha, ha !’ with an attempt at his old laugh, interrupted by a hiccough.

White and sober went Rolly’s face as he noted Mordaunt’s. The men questioned Sinclair ; the name ‘Lucilla’ had aroused no thought in their breasts ; they scarcely had heard, certainly barely remembered, the name of the shy and silent girl who had for a few weeks haunted with her white face Rolly’s festive house. The bare idea of Sinclair Furley and a girl tickled their fancy. They drew him out, and he deprecated and chuckled loosely, and implied much, while the fun grew fast and furious, and the comedian more and more helpless.

‘Wait until we can get him away from these fellows,’ Rolly had begged Mordaunt ; ‘they don’t know of whom he’s talking.’

‘I’ll wring his neck.’

‘Do, but wait ; they’ll turn on to something else

presently, and we'll get him away and question him ; no good making a fuss—for her sake, Mordie, for mine, keep quiet here.'

Through the fumes of wine and smoke, across these hot and drunken men and women, there came to both men the image of the girl, fair and young, her sensitive lips and blue eyes.

Mordaunt saw the justice of Rolly's plea, although the rage of a wild beast was in his heart and his hands were tingling for Sinclair's throat : so acutely vivid was his impression that he could even feel the repulsion as the soft flabby flesh yielded under his grasp.

' Rolly, I can't, I can't !' he gasped. Rolly held him.

Fortunately there was a diversion at the moment. A glass door leads from the shop to the entry of the private rooms ; through this Ted Smith just caught sight of a man : he thought he saw a sneaking desire to be unnoticed.

' Hullo, Bill !' he shouted, and flung a champagne bottle smash through the semi-transparent panels. Attracted by the noise the proprietor hurried out. The gentleman, who did not happen to be Bill, burst through the damaged door and resented the assault in a muscular manner. That

he chanced to hit upon the wrong man, and commenced to pommel Tom Furley instead of Ted, was the worse for him, but only added to the general hilarity. Then they all surged away from Sinclair, and joined in the free fight with gaiety and lightheartedness. The insult was finally wiped out with more glasses round. The gentleman, whose name was not Bill, found himself in congenial company, and the lady with him was not embarrassed at being seen. Ted promised to pay for the repair of the glass-door—promising to pay was an amiable characteristic of Ted's; and the night set in wet.

Mordaunt could not stand the loose atmosphere, once Lucilla had again established herself in him. He needed all his strength to save himself from flying at the wretched boaster, or cramming his words down his unmanly throat. But he did restrain himself, and he walked up and down the street, arm and arm with Rolly, neither speaking, until at length Sinclair, staggering, uncertain in his steps, talking loudly, incoherently, reeled out, two or three young men guiding his way, encouraging him in the talk which Mordaunt could feel was still of Lucilla.

‘No, no, he washn’t goin’ to give her ’dress,

washn't likely ; knew better. Find it out for themselves . . . Ha, ha !'

Mordaunt exchanged glances with Rolly, then he took his resolution in an instant.

He met the little cortége ; none of them were quite steady enough to know or question whence he had come ; he joined them naturally, and equally naturally they let him into the joke.

'There, you fellows,' said Mordaunt as quietly as he could, 'leave him with me. I'll see him home. I am going that way. And if he lets out anything more entertaining, I'll let you know it in the morning. You'd better see each other home ; it is very nearly the day after to-morrow, so you can't complain you've not had enough of it.'

'Take him carefully,' shouted Ted, 'he's a valuable party ; never laughed so much in my life !'

The laughter rang out again. Mordaunt put his arm into Sinclair's, and commenced to pilot him carefully home, Rolly taking the other side.

Sinclair was for going on with the conversation ; he could not quit the subject.

'Hold your tongue,' said Mordaunt sharply, 'you've said enough for one night.'

Sinclair stared at him sharply, and said nothing more.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THEY went home with him; Mordaunt and Rolly took him up the two pairs of stairs, and into his rooms. Rolly left him to Mordaunt. Mordaunt half led, half pushed him into a chair.

‘Sit there,’ he said roughly.

Sinclair’s head fell gently forward.

‘Very comfortable,’ he muttered; ‘shall get drunk again.’

‘Beast!’ ejaculated Mordaunt.

And Sinclair Furley, sober, being a weak-kneed, flabby individual, it may be imagined what sort of a sight was presented by Sinclair Furley drunk. The loose jaw had fallen, and the thick lips no longer concealed the decayed and yellow teeth; his long straight hair tumbled over his half-open bloodshot eyes.

‘Beast,’ said Mordaunt again with emphasis.

‘What do you want with him?’ asked Rolly.

Mordaunt turned on him savagely.

‘I want the girl’s address. I want to know where she is and what she is doing. You may leave her to a thing like that.’ He made a gesture of utter disgust toward Sinclair. ‘I can’t.’

‘Shan’t give her ’dress ; shan’t give her ’dress,’ mumbled Sinclair, with the unreasoning obstinacy of the intoxicated.

‘But you can’t get it from him now,’ answered Rolly. ‘Wait until to-morrow, or have him followed ; but I don’t believe he has it, or there may be other Lucillas. It is not such an uncommon name.’

Mordaunt gave Rolly a glance of bitter contempt, and said :

‘Or do any other damned thing that will relieve you of present responsibility.’

Then he strode over to Sinclair, and grasped him firmly by the throat. Rolly made a start forward.

‘What are you doing? Don’t kill the man.’

‘Mind your own business,’ answered the other.

He gave a slight shake, and Sinclair opened his eyes and looked about him feebly smiling.

‘Beautiful Lucilla, don’t hold me too tight.’

‘I’ll throttle you, you blackguard, if you don’t tell me her address.’

‘Her ’dress, her ’dress? Oh, no, no, never give her ’dress.’

Mordaunt tightened his grasp. Rolly sprang forward.

‘I won’t have it, Mordaunt; I won’t have it. You’ll kill him. Good God, man, think of what you are doing. Are you mad?’

‘Mad? Yes, I am mad.’ He looked up with his white face and flaming eyes. ‘He shall tell me, or I’ll kill him.’

But Rolly pushed him on one side, and he fell back. The passion that had seized him when he had looked at the man and imagined Lucilla in his keeping or in his power had passed.

‘Why did you not let me do it?’ he said with a bitter laugh. ‘I should have deserved a medal from the National Vigilance Society if I’d killed Sinclair Furley.’

‘You don’t know how to manage him,’ said Rolly indignantly. ‘I’ll get your information for you in ten minutes without killing a man who can’t defend himself.’

Mordaunt was more miserable than anything else now. He just subsided into a chair, resting

his head in his hand ; tried to realize what it would mean to him if he heard that this girl had fled from his arms, not from fear, not from modesty and maidenly alarms, but with treachery and some perverted instinct, to Sinclair Furley.

Very gently Rolly dealt with him. If he felt repulsion or disgust, he concealed it.

‘ Here, Furley, wake up, we want a drink. Can’t you find us anything ? Let us have a jolly evening together.’

‘ Yesh, yesh, a jolly evening. I want another drink myself.’

‘ Where shall I find it ?’

‘ Find it in the cupboard—get it myself. Can walk quite straight. Ha, ha !’

He staggered to his feet, but would have fallen against the table had not Rolly assisted him.

‘ No, no, old man, I’ll get it ; you sit there.’ He turned his back to him as he went to the cupboard but continued talking. ‘ Quite right of you not to give the girl’s address to-night, whatever the other fellows may have said. I always did think you were a man of discretion. It isn’t as if they were such pals of yours either. Which do you take, a wee “drappie” of Scotch, or some “three star” ?’ He mixed him a stiff tumbler of whisky

with a very little water, then came back to the table. 'Here you are ; as I was saying, it isn't as if they were pals of yours. You wouldn't give anyone the address ; quite right. I should have been awfully annoyed with you if you had ; so would Lucy.'

'So would Lucy,' hiccoughed Sinclair, raising the glass spillingly to his lips ; 'pretty Lucy. But how do you know ? Who told you ? It's a shecret,' he replied suddenly.

'Who told me ? Well, that's good.'

'I'm going to marry Lucilla.' He had got the contents of the glass down his throat, and for the moment woke up again. 'The General will marry us himself. You'll come, Rolly ?' trying to catch hold of him. 'You'll be best man ? No, no, can't be best man ; you'll give her away ; forgot you were a father—not like anybody's father, Rolly isn't—Rolly Lewesham. Ha, ha !'

'Why didn't she change her name ?' asked Rolly suddenly.

He had winced, though, a little, when Sinclair had laughed at his fatherhood, but he meant to prove to Mordaunt his skill in getting the information he wanted.

'Change her name ? She'll change her name ;

she'll have my name. Ha, ha! What 'cher talkin' about? Lucilla Furley, Newport Buildings, shan't give her 'dress to anybody; teach her too much. She'll kiss them too, pretty Lucilla.'

Mordaunt sprang to his feet, but again Rolly restrained him by a glance. He was so near attainment now, he filled the glass up again.

'But you won't be able to see her in the morning. Shall I give her any message from you?'

'Tell her 'bout that girl to-night; put her arms round me. No, she'll be jealous; don't tell her. Give my love.'

He was getting very drowsy again. Hastily Rolly said:

'All right, I'll give her your message; No. 7, Newport Buildings?'

'What 'cher talkin' 'bout? Twenty-six. Oh, Lord, what a way up! I must lie down.'

'Lie down and be ——!' wound up Rolly, turning away. 'Now, Mordaunt, you've got all you want to know, come on.'

'I should like to kick him first.'

'Oh, leave him alone; he'll have hell in the morning, and he can't drink his bath, because it's ten to one against his having one.'

Then they got out of the room, and Mordaunt drew a breath of relief, yet of pain. Rolly could hardly look at him.

‘It’s very rough on you, isn’t it?’ he said at length.

‘Don’t think of me ; I am not thinking of myself—I am thinking of the girl. Some foul trickery there must have been. You must go to her.’

‘Yes, yes ; I’ll go.’

‘Tell Nettie to-night. See if you can take her home, if—if she wants to come.’

Mordaunt’s voice was curiously low, and even he was feeling too intensely for emotion to find vent in accent.

‘I will. I’ll tell Nettie the whole story. I never told her she wasn’t with you. I didn’t want a row ; I’ll tell her to-night.’

‘You let her think she was with me?’

‘Yes ; but it will be all right now. Nettie will be all right. She’s got over her tempers ; she’s not a bad sort at bottom.’

‘Good-night.’

Mordaunt left him suddenly. In truth, Mordaunt’s capacity for concealing his feelings was pretty nearly at an end. He thought of the scene

at the restaurant, of the spectacle of Sinclair at his rooms ; he remembered the shy, first yielding of Lucilla's girlish lips, and his pure, keen delight as he recognised the answer to his love struggling through the maiden shyness. Then he thought of Sinclair—Sinclair as he had known him and read him—his style of conversation, and his way of regarding women ; and of Nettie, who had flown into a rage at hearing that Lucilla had been with him ; and of Nettie's reconciliation with Lucilla when it was known that Sinclair Furley had been with Lucilla.

Mordaunt did not wish to think again as he had thought in those first few weeks of the Bohemia he had lived and worked in, but unconsciously it again revolted him. The whole world around him, *Footlights* and its concomitants, were base, and vile, and filthy ; and he, man as he was, with his birth, with his wife, could yet see and feel the depths of moral degradation in which he and they had all sunk together.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOWEVER, he met Rolly the next day in his usual manner. He wanted to hear what Nettie had said—whether Rolly would be able to take the girl home with him, if she were willing to go. He could not piece together the story of the girl's disappearance from his room that night, nor find the connection between it and Sinclair Furley's words.

He was irritable in his questioning of Rolly ; and Rolly, ill-at-ease himself over the task he had before him, responded as shortly as he could. Nettie said the girl could come back if she liked. Nettie said she didn't care a curse if Lucilla had been with Mordaunt or Sinclair, as long as she no longer set up for a saint, and made them all uncomfortable.

If Mordaunt writhed under Nettie's words, Rolly did not attempt to make them more savoury to him. But Nettie had said some coarser things, and these Rolly did not repeat.

They walked together, and at length they reached Newport Buildings.

‘Will you come in with me?’ Rolly asked Mordaunt nervously.

‘No,’ he answered, with some bitterness showing through his voice. ‘She left me ; if it’s true, as that beast suggested, that he has known all the time where she was, that she has been with him, then God knows I don’t want to see her again. I don’t want to share his privileges.’

The building, large and grim and ugly, was before them, but Rolly held back.

‘Wait a bit ; wait a bit, Mordaunt.’ He took hold of his arm. ‘Look here, old fellow, if you think, don’t you know, or if you believe she is with Furley, what am I to go to her for? I can’t play the heavy father ; I can’t come the virtuous over her, or ask her to return to the path of duty.’

Mordaunt stopped short and faced Rolly, his face working with emotion, and very pale.

‘Rolly,’ he said with concentrated passion, ‘I don’t believe one word of it. So help me, God, I don’t credit one single syllable of it! I don’t believe she left me for Sinclair Furley. Why, man alive’—his voice grew deeper, and trembled a little—‘she loved me!’ He moistened his lips

and paused for half-a-minute, as certain incidents forced themselves on his memory, and told him it was indeed true that she had loved him. 'I *know* she has not been with him, but on the merest chance that she has, *I* cannot go to her. It is your place ; you must question her, you must find out the whole story from beginning to end—where she has been, what she has been doing ; she will tell you the truth—Lucy is the soul of truth.'

He walked with him up the courtyard. He wrung his hand when they parted.

'Do your best for her, old man.'

'I will,' answered Rolly, and pressed his in reply.

Up the five pairs of stairs went Rolly, lightly at first, less so as he neared the fifth floor.

'God, it doesn't look like affluence!' he thought, as he noted the bare stone stairs, the pauper smell that hung about the building. He was really nervous about the meeting with his daughter. He did not believe, or hardly believed, that she had been with Sinclair, but he could not guess how he would find her ; the whole thing was an enigma to him—one that he hesitated at solving.

Yet of all the situations he imagined none approached the reality that met his gaze, as without

knocking he opened the door and stood on the threshold, too thunderstruck to advance.

A small, bare room, a little bed in one corner, a deal table pushed against the wall. In the middle of the room four women were kneeling, in dark blue uniforms, a red ribbon round their bonnets. They were more than kneeling, they were almost grovelling on the floor, rocking themselves to and fro, their hands before their faces, as they sang in chorus—

‘On my knees I fall,
Give Thee up my all.’

‘I beg pardon,’ he stammered, ‘I have come to the wrong room.’ He would have retreated, he was on the point of retiring, when one from out these kneeling women rose hurriedly. Under that bonnet gleamed a face he knew, fair, though not so childlike as he had seen it.

‘Father, father!’ she cried, and in a moment was in his arms.

All the past she had forgotten, all the sorrow, all the shame; the mysterious blood-love moved her; up from the Father in heaven she sprang to the father on earth.

‘Lucy, Lucy!’ The ready tears started to his

eyes ; he kissed her, and the soft warm flesh appealed to him, and the round contours ; his arms were around her, and the glow of affection was warm between them, and melted them one to another. .

He held her close to him ; for the moment forgot the scene he had interrupted, her dress, the whole mystery of the situation.

Then it flashed into his mind where Sinclair had been these months—repelled, he drew back from her.

‘ You followed him into the Salvation Army?’ he exclaimed, dismayed.

‘ Yes,’ answered Captain Nelly for Lucilla, whose sensitiveness had already taken alarm at her father’s expression. ‘ He said “ Arise and follow Me,” and she obeyed the voice. Glory, hallelujah.’

Rolly stared at her ; his wit was at fault for once.

‘ What does she mean?’ he asked, staring from his newly-found daughter to Captain Nelly, from Captain Nelly to her recruits, and again to his daughter. ‘ Who is she ; what does it all mean?’

‘ Captain Nelly rescued me from the streets.’

‘ From the streets,’ repeated Rolly, and a pain shot through him ; he stretched out his arm again for his daughter, and held her to him.

‘ Yes,’ she answered simply, although blushing red ; ‘ I ran away—I ran into the streets.’ A sob

rose in her voice. 'I had no one to run to. They brought me here, and I have been here with them ever since.'

'Praise His name!' ejaculated Nelly, and the recruits echoed her. She had been listening with interest to Lucilla's halting story, and missed the salt of Biblical quotation.

Lucilla caressed her father's hand, and clung to him ; the warmth of his human love seemed more precious to her in this moment than all the life of faith and renunciation.

'Who told you where to find me?' she asked him.

'Sinclair Furley,' he answered, and was embarrassed.

'It is time to go out,' interrupted Captain Nelly ; 'but stay with your father, and we will work the vineyard alone. Try and bring the truth home to him ; be faithful to your Master's commands.' Lucilla felt the effect Nelly would be having on her father, and glanced at him nervously.

His lips had a humorous expression, but he said nothing until with a parting 'God bless you,' in their long cloaks they sallied forth, and in the distance their voices sounded together as they sang in the going downstairs : 'Only the Blood can save us.' Then he turned to Lucilla.

‘Can’t we sit down and be a little more comfortable?’ he asked. She drew a chair up to the fire for him, and took up her place at his feet, resting against him.

‘Take that revolting head-gear off.’ She obeyed him, and then he caressed her hair.

‘Well,’ he said at length, ‘tell me all about it.’

‘There is so little to tell.’

‘About Sinclair?’

‘He asked me to marry him, and I said “Yes,”’ she hid her face against his knee.

‘He hasn’t been keeping you?’

‘What!’ she raised her head, and read the meaning of his question in his expression of doubt and disgust.

‘O, father, father!’ she moaned out, then burst into tears and wept with her face hidden. She was abased by the question, but it seemed to bring home to her again the indelibility of that birth-stain he had told her of. Oh, she was vile! and her own father thought of her only as this.

And Rolly, tender-hearted Rolly, who could not bear to see her cry, to see her slender frame shaken by the sobs that broke from her, caressed her.

‘Don’t, don’t, Lucy; don’t cry. You can’t help it; it isn’t your fault. I don’t want to know

anything, I won't ask any more questions. It's in the blood, I suppose. Don't cry.'

She left off crying. After all, it was sweet to be comforted and caressed, and again the softness of Rolly's nature appealed to her, and she loved him. He loved her, even though he thought her vile. He who had loved her, thinking her pure and good; only he, she must hide from and shrink from; only he, must never know.

'Come home,' said Rolly at length; 'if you are going to marry Sinclair, you can do it from Southampton Row.'

'He hasn't kept me,' she said, the blood burning in her cheeks; 'these people have.'

'Look here,' said Rolly desperately, 'I don't know what to think. You ran away from Mor-daunt, and you went in the streets. Why? why? why? There you met Sinclair and joined the Salvation Army with him.'

'No, no, I was in a Refuge.'

Rolly winced under that.

'Where does Sinclair come into the story? For God's sake, try and explain yourself!'

'I met him at the training-home. I saw him twice. He asked me to marry him. I couldn't live always like this, so I said "Yes."'

‘When was this?’

‘Yesterday.’

Rolly was relieved. Everything else faded into insignificance.

‘Come home with me,’ he said again.

He saw Lucilla miserable, and he wanted to make her happy. She was no longer the delicate girl-child before whose pure eyes his home seemed debased and his comrades degraded. Now she was what her mother had been, and Nettie, and the women amongst whom he lived. Very deep down in his heart there was a regret—a feeling he could not explain ; shame or sorrow? But outside there was only the thought that now she and Nettie would get on better, now he need no longer mince his words nor guard his deeds before her.

And she, poor child, knowing her hope of Heaven left her thirst for life unslaked, accounted herself as vile, simply because she was human. She knew she could no longer lead the saint’s life of the women around her, with eyes on God alone.

The doors of Bohemia were open to her—laughter and music and love. Her thin mantle of religion, in the falling, had left her bare and cold. In the word ‘home’ there was something that warmed her. Was it indeed home where she and

Marius had lived their lives? Why should she feel a glow and a thrill at the thought of going back to Southampton Row, where she had heard laughter in which she could not share; where Nettie and Nettie's lovers had played and sung and kissed, while she had sat in that small back-room and listened to Sinclair Furley—while her eyes were riveted on the door, and her ears were strained for a step, a voice that was not his?

Home! was it indeed home to her—that scented house, close and warm, filled with fumes of smoke and the scent of spirits; where the bells were never silent and the rooms never empty; where humanity exposed its nakedness, and laughed through its days gaily?

‘Come away,’ said Rolly.

Lucilla looked around her. She had clung to Captain Nelly in her direst extremity; these walls had seen her anguish on the night she realized what she had been saved from. Could she leave them? Could she go back to where her father and Nettie lived together; where there was loose living and light talking, and no God to pray to for help? Where Mordaunt sometimes came?

Could she abandon salvation?

CHAPTER XXVI.

AND her heart answered, she could.

Four months ago her young and tender maidenhood, waking to her perils, shrank back afraid, and she had fled. And for refuge she had turned to God. Then she had found there was no God for her, and Sinclair Furley drove the truth home with his loose hammer of lewd suggestion. She was very weak—morally, intellectually, physically—a girl that had needed the calm of domesticity and household love in which to rear a soul; and in the slow heating-house of family affection she might have grown strong and healthful. But she was Rolly's daughter and her mother's daughter, and for domesticity there was Nettie, and for companions there was the staff of the *Guzzler's Gazette*, and for teacher there was Sinclair Furley, the realist—the man whose mental excreta soiled every word that percolated through the laboratory of his diseased imagination.

But what makes Lucilla interesting in spite of her other weaknesses is the instinct that kept her from Mordaunt.

She went with Rolly back to Southampton Row, where Nettie received her warmly, as a pal—a degradation that, instead of resenting, Lucilla responded to and rejoiced over.

The life in Southampton Row was what it had ever been. The enervating mornings in bed ; the long afternoons, when the staff came, or Nettie's new lover came, and brandies-and-sodas were drunk, and songs were sung over, and the creeping dusk found them all in noisy intimacy. When the women sat or lounged about on sofas, and the men sat by them. The evenings after the theatre, with the supper-parties at which they all got drunk; the horseplay and the strange songs and anecdotes, the unchanged dionysiac atmosphere.

But Lucilla was aloof no longer. No longer was song hushed, or anecdote expurgated ; she was one of themselves. Soon she ceased to blush when Ted Smith would pass her a letter, or ask her opinion on a verse. She grew in intimacy with Nettie ; coarseness ceased to jar upon her. After all, it was not the coarseness of the Refuge, nor of

the streets; there was wit in it, and more suggestiveness than exposure.

And Sinclair Furley added to the development of her nature. They were engaged; there was no talk of marriage between; he never asked her to name a date, near or distant; but he claimed her companionship, and he sat by her side.

He read his Salvation Army play to her, and sang the blasphemous songs into which he had altered their earnest lines; he confided his ambitions to her, and they all ran on the same lines. Notoriety, that was his god. His unsavoury reputation gave him no pain; his uneasy vanity was ever on the alert for *notice*. Also he told the girl stories of women—women who had offered themselves to him, and whom he had repulsed. She grew to loathe his sallowness, his white hands with their yellow nails, his light eyes and loose lips, with a loathing that turned her sick, and made her brain reel, as she sat beside him, and the breath of him was about her.

But she did not hate the other men about the house, nor the anecdotes about them that Nettie had told her, nor their attentions to her. She joined in the life about her; the only thing she

pushed away from her constantly was the thought of Mordaunt. For the rest, she grew to think constantly of lovers, and love in its phases of consummation ; she grew to look with eyes no longer pure on men and women.

A terribly dangerous phase for a girl to be in. She was all alive to love and to be loved, and her mind was filled with no other thoughts. If Ted Smith, with his fair beardless face and laughing mouth met her on the stairs, and put his arm around her, she dreamt of him all night. If Tom Furley, big and blackbearded, took advantage of his future relationship to take a kiss in the dusk or gloaming, she was filled with his presence for hours after.

And she grew in beauty. Even Rolly was surprised sometimes at the fairness of her when he saw her in evening dress, and he would look away. Rolly never grew fond of Lucilla's company, never heard her laugh with the others without a feeling of uneasiness crossing his mind ; never saw her sitting on a sofa, with some man lounging beside her, without a frown settling on his face. But Sinclair Furley cared nothing that womanhood should fail and virginal fears and flushes melt under those long lascivious hours with

shoulder touching shoulder and breath meeting breath.

So the weeks went on, and the Salvation Army faded into the background of her mind, and Mordaunt's image was dim. Her engagement to Sinclair seemed as a liaison that would never reach a climax—a somebody like these other women had in husband or lover—from whom to conceal sentiment and action.

The paper flourished firmly. The paper kept them all—all these men, and the hospitable house where champagne was drunk out of soda-water glasses, and big Havanas were as plentiful as blackberries. Over the bare shoulders of the actresses they undraped, *Footlights* and its staff reached ease and affluence.

And at the office, Mordaunt Rivers wrote and edited, and spoke of Lucilla only once, and then worked on.

He did not see Rolly for two or three weeks after Lucilla had gone home ; then he met him at *Footlights* office. Rolly nodded to him, took his pen and worked silently ; equally silently Mordaunt's pen scratched on a few minutes, though his hands were hot and his heart beating.

Then suddenly, abruptly he said :

‘ Did you see her ?’

‘ Yes, she is at the Row ; she is going to marry Furley.’

Rolly recognised that Lucilla was not what she had been, and held Mordaunt’s love so highly, to think that if he saw her now it would not live ; and the good in Rolly, never quite dead, made him sympathetic enough to wish to spare his friend the knowledge. And Mordaunt read his reticence wrongly, and he avoided Rolly’s house, and Rolly’s party at theatres and music-halls.

So it might have gone on, until deterioration had been followed by decay, and decay by utter rottenness ; but such was not to be Lucilla’s fate.

Mordaunt had avoided all places where Rolly and his party were to be met, and Rolly had assisted him tacitly and silently in so doing. But accident accomplished what design had frustrated so long.

It happened this way : the Tessie Gay fever had vanished for Rolly, and Rolly for the moment was without an object of devotion. As usual under such circumstances, he was much at home. Every night there would be company to dinner. Ted Smith would come, and not only Lord Lusher,

but Lord Sandel, who had shared with Rolly the affections of the dethroned Tessie.

It was a cheery little dinner-party. Ronald Saunders, the young tenor, who was Nettie's lover; Lord Sandel, low-browed and coarse-nosed, but strong, broad-chested and lean-flanked; Johnnie Targer, a young lady who had been the missing witness in a notorious divorce case. There was nothing else noticeable about her: neither her appearance, nor her talents, nor her intelligence; but she had disappeared and reappeared in a conveniently startling manner. It had been a *cause célèbre*, so she was given a leading part at a west-end theatre, and walked ungracefully through it, to the gratification of the audience who came to see and not to hear. Rolly had paragraphed her. Nettie had been introduced to the co-respondent whom she had assisted. Johnnie Targer now made Southampton Row her headquarters.

Lucilla sat opposite Lord Sandel; presently she noted his eyes fixed upon her. She returned the glance.

'Here's luck,' he said, lifting his glass, and she bowed and smiled her acknowledgments.

Nothing else passed during that dinner, yet the glance set Lucy's heart beating. What had she

heard of Lord Sandel? She remembered ; he had a wife in his own sphere who did not know of Nettie, nor of Tessie Gay. Lord Sandel was rich ; he was heir to a dukedom ; he was very, very fast, and when he had grown sick of Tessie he had given her £10,000 ; but she had cost him as much more.

‘What are we going to do this evening?’ Nettie asked, as she lit his cigarette.

‘Let’s take the ladies out somewhere,’ suggested Sandel.

He did not look at Lucilla.

‘There is nothing we haven’t seen,’ Rolly objected. ‘It’s too warm for the Troc., and I can’t stand those beastly performing dogs at the Pav. Lottie Stephens has got a supper-party, but we can’t take them there.’

‘Sims Reeves is advertised at the Albert Hall,’ put in Ronald Saunders timidly.

He was very young. Nettie’s lovers seemed to grow younger as she grew older. Ronald Saunders was also going to be a great singer, presently, when she had trained him. In the meantime, the boy hung about her, and fancied himself in love with her, and sang to her accompaniments.

Sandel looked at him under his heavy brows,

when he made the proposition. The Albert Hall with this party did not suit him at all.

‘Let’s go to the Aquarium,’ he said, ‘and see the tattooed man ; he has just come back.’

‘Oh yes,’ came in chorus from Nettie and Johnnie Targer.

The men went on smoking and drinking, while the ladies withdrew to make the necessary changes in their toilettes. Lucilla put on her sealskin toque and jacket over her black dinner dress. She felt excited ; she thought it was because she had never been to the Aquarium. The carriage came round—*Footlights* could support a carriage now—and the three ladies went in it. But Sandel objected to them going alone ; he would accompany them, and Rolly and Mr. Saunders would follow in a hansom.

He sat with Lucilla, their backs to the horses. Sometimes the carriage jolted, and their knees touched. But he did not speak to her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE Aquarium was gloomy and cold, and half-empty. A few respectable parties, with labour-stained hands, carrying babies, leading younger children — a few women, gaily dressed, leaning against the pillars, or talking in groups, depressed and quiet.

‘It’s very early,’ said Rolly, as if apologetically.

All together they went to where there is a platform and seats in front, and dreary music-hall artists divide the stage with *poses plastiques* and worn out *tableaux vivants*. The gloom of the place seemed to settle on the party, and the warmth of the dinner and drink evaporated from them.

Soon they had had enough of the *poses plastiques* and the entertainment generally. But before they went to the reception of the tattooed gentleman upstairs they went to the bar, and endeavoured to supply the lack of external warmth by setting up an inner conflagration. Then they shook hands

with the cold and silky-feeling Prince of Tattooland, and somehow or other—his room was full, and that may account for it—the party got separated. Lucilla found herself outside with Lord Sandel.

It was later now, the groups larger, many more young men, many more women, the hall warmer and more full of life.

‘Take my arm,’ said Sandel, and Lucilla obeyed him. ‘I think they went to see the swimming; I heard Rolly say something about it. We had better go.’

‘Oh yes,’ she answered, ‘let us try and find them.’

But she was not nervous or apprehensive of not doing so. They went with a struggling crowd, consisting chiefly of the women with husbands and babies, towards the vault-like apartment in which Professor Beckwith gives demonstrations of his art. They took their seats right at the extreme corner, near the top of the room, furthest from the door.

Lucilla watched the swimming: the men, broad and sinuous, cleaving their way through the grimy water with long side stroke, their muscles big and prominent. Then the women, their long hair streaming as they floated on their backs, and the

well-directed limelight made them metallically bright against the dark waters. They swam this way and that with their feet only and with their hands only ; they swam through hoops, and dived one over the other. It all amused her, and Sandel watched her smiling interest. She was all so pretty : blue eyes and dimpling mouth, and fair skin against the dark seal.

Last feat of all, the professor would undress in the water, smoke a cigar, and let off a pistol. And as the loud report of the pistol rang through the air Lucilla started, and her companion grasped her hand and kept it.

‘ Were you frightened ? ’

‘ Only for a second. ’

She tried to withdraw her hand.

‘ I’ll take care of you ; don’t try to get away. Say, you and I get on well together, don’t we ? ’ He looked at her from under his heavy-lidded eyes.

She dropped hers.

‘ Yes, ’ she said hesitatingly, then looked up with a gleam of coquettishness. ‘ But we haven’t known each other very long. ’

‘ I caught your eye at dinner. I knew I liked you then. I only came here to talk to you. ’

‘ Did you ? ’

‘ You know I did.’

The performance was over, but in getting out Lucy and Lord Sandel were quite the last; he kept hold of her hand, and the clasp of his was warm, and a thrill ran through her. She felt excited. Had he fallen in love with her? Just as they left the hall the lights went out. As if to protect her from the crush, he released her hand and put his arm round her waist. She grew hot and nervous.

‘ It’s all right—keep close to me.’ She had no choice but to do so.

Now the hall was full of people—warm with life and liquor. Men and women were talking, and she could guess of what.

‘ Where are the others?’ asked Lucilla.

‘ Oh, we shall find them. Would you mind if we didn’t?’

‘ Oh yes, it must be late.’

‘ If we didn’t find them, I could take care of you. Stay here—we can watch for them from here.’

He leaned against a pillar. Up to now Lucilla had enjoyed it all : the ugliness and brutal strength of the man, the histories she had heard of him, and those looks, heavy and sensual, that thrilled her with excitement, pain or pleasure.

But now he leaned against a post, and as she stood to talk to him it flashed into her mind all at once that she looked like those other women around her, and then the blushes came, and she said :

‘Come and find them ; we cannot find them staying here.’

‘There is time enough. I say ’—he seized her hand—‘I want to talk to you. I haven’t talked to you at all yet. I think you and I are going to be very good friends.’

She did not want to stay there with him, but she did not want to drive him right away from her. She had a desire for conquest ; but in the art she was unlearned, therefore she was timid, and did not know how to answer.

‘Don’t you think so?’

His gaze fixed her ; her head drooped under it.

‘I don’t know,’ she answered.

‘A fellow like me wants some dear little girl like you to take an interest in him. What a little hand you’ve got.’

‘Yours is so big.’

‘Oh ! perhaps that’s it.’ He squeezed it. ‘I can scarcely feel it in mine. I suppose I seem an ugly, coarse chap to you altogether ; you are such a little thing.’

‘Oh no, no.’ She would not hurt his feelings for the world, or anybody’s feelings for the matter of that ; she raised her eyes to his. ‘You are not ugly,’ she said.

But he was, for his hair grew low, and his thick eyebrows nearly met, his lips were thick under the moustache, and he was heavy jawed and rough skinned. His figure, carriage, swaying movement from the hips, alone redeemed him from the Old Bailey type. He laughed.

‘So you don’t think me ugly. I am glad of that. Who gave you your coat?’

‘Papa.’

‘He ought to have given you a nice little brooch to fasten it with. A little bar of diamonds. Don’t you like diamonds?’

‘I like pearls best,’ she answered innocently ; ‘but do come now and find the others.’

‘I don’t want to go, I’m quite happy here ; you’ve got a little dimple in your chin,’ he touched it with his finger.

So they talked a little while. Lucilla feared and thrilled, and grew nervous under words and looks and touches. She did not know if she wanted to find the others, or if she did not. It was exciting, and she knew she would enjoy it more in retro-

spect, when her imagination would run riot, and give her all the pleasure without the little flaws she saw now ; when his rough skin and coarse hair repelled her notwithstanding herself.

It was very late. Lord Sandel, as he stood there talking, knew that Rolly and the others had left the hall, when they had gone to see the swimming, but he kept his knowledge to himself. *Noblesse oblige*, but the greatest obligation noblesse was under was to enjoy itself. Lucilla was fair, pretty. Notwithstanding where he had found her—Lord Sandel did not overrate Rolly's circle of friends—she was not quite the same as the girls or women he had met. He had tired of Tessie's coarseness ; Tessie was never satisfied unless public attention was drawn to her ; she was loud-voiced and loud-mannered, and Lord Sandel had grown tired of it. Now here was quite a different girl, soft and gentle, not too difficult. Sandel never took too much trouble over this sort of thing. So they stood and talked. And they might have talked until it was too late to talk more ; but as Lucilla stood there in the dusk by the pillar, she saw a man lounge past arm in arm with Ted Smith, and at the sight the colour forsook her cheek, and all the fear and excitement and the

dreams of weeks past vanished, and like heavy hammers fell the beats of her heart.

‘Mordaunt,’ burst from her lips unguarded. And he turned and saw her standing there with Sandel, and across his face there swept an expression, too bright for sneer, too contemptuous for scorn, but he stopped.

‘Oh ! it’s you ; well, and how do you find yourself?’ he said as coolly as if they had shaken hands and parted but yesterday. But the tone, the manner ! Not so had he spoken to her in the olden days. And her head drooped and her cheeks flushed hotly as he spoke to her, and she did not hold out her hand to him.

The drooped head, and the ready blush, shocked Mordaunt more than would a ready repartee, or a skilled glance. Ted and Lord Sandel spoke, and the latter asked him if he had seen Rolly.

‘They went home. I saw them about an hour ago ; they were going to see “Martinetti” at the Royal ; some of the boys are there, and we are going on to sup at the Row before we go to Lottie Stephens’s party. We’d better all go together, if you are ready.’ Ted glanced at Lucilla ; he rather admired Lucilla, but Ted never soared higher than a barmaid, when he got really mashed ; refinement

was such a bore! Still, he didn't quite see leaving the girl with Sandel.

'Yes, yes,' said Lucilla quickly. Now she wanted desperately to get away. Glamour had vanished, nothing remained but Mordaunt, and he stood there with the love-light gone out of his eyes and his lips sneering.

Now a long descent, a public school, a university, and an acknowledged place among nobles cannot give morals, but they can undoubtedly provide manners.

'Let us all go home together,' said Lucilla feverishly.

'Certainly; a very good idea,' was Lord Sandel's prompt reply.

'I can't come,' said Mordaunt shortly, stopping as the others walked on. 'I've got an engagement.'

'Rot! you're going to Lottie's, you told me so; you can't have an engagement between then and now.'

Lucilla said not one word; yet what made Mordaunt hesitate? Why had he stayed away? Why should he not meet her? see her now that he knew she was 'like the others.' And Nettie: what had Nettie done or said to keep him from her so

long? And Rolly would be so pleased to see him, Mordaunt could picture how his face would light up to welcome and . . . and . . . and . . .

‘A four-wheeler is beastly, let’s take two hansoms. Jump in,’ Ted said to Lucilla, as the hansom he called drove up to the curb.

Who would go with the girl? Sandel? Ted prevented that, for he thought Sandel had had time enough ; no real reason, but he didn’t care that Lucilla, with whom he had had a light staircase flirtation, should forsake him for Sandel.

‘You go with Miss Lewesham, Mordaunt,’ he said ; ‘I’ll go with Sandel.’

It was impossible for Mordaunt to refuse.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SIDE by side those two drove. Mordaunt would be cool and calm, now the girl was nothing to him.

‘Will you have the window shut?’ he asked politely. ‘The wind is very cold.’

She shivered slightly.

‘I don’t know ; I don’t care.’ Her voice was so low he could scarcely hear her.

‘Was there a good entertainment on?—I came in late,’ he asked.

He wanted to hear her speak, to know the gulf that lay between his Lucilla of that summer day on the river, and the Lucilla who was going to marry Sinclair Furley—who leaned up against the pillar at the Aquarium and talked to Lord Sandel.

But she did not answer.

Then he looked down upon her—so small, so frail, so . . . so cold—and a rush of tenderness came over him. He could not help it. He took

her little hand and raised it to his breast all suddenly. She snatched her hand away, and shrank into the corner of the cab away from him.

Then the loose window rattled, and the wind came in under it ; and the skeleton of a cab-horse, under the lash, made spasmodic efforts to increase his speed, but Mordaunt and Lucilla seemed to have nothing to say to each other.

They reached Southampton Row, and he assisted her to alight. To both of them the drive had been short. Her throat and her heart were too full for words ; but as he helped her from the cab, she left her hand in his, and in the eyes that looked up to him, he saw swimming tears and a timid pleading look.

They had no time now for words, for Teddie and Sandel were there as soon as they ; and soon they were in the house. The room was full when they entered. The party had been reinforced at the Aquarium, and there seemed to be no longer any talk of going to Lottie Stephens's party. As, indeed, why should there ? for every ingredient that could go to make Lottie Stephens's party pleasant was here, without the trouble of moving. All the 'boys,' the innocent name under which all the young men about town were designated—good

old Jenny Farrell, Johnnie Targer, Lady Lusher, and one or two other sirens of the same water.

Such a laughing and talking and popping of corks, as the men were helping the women off with their cloaks, for they all seemed to have just come in ; and jewels gleamed on white necks and arms through the atmosphere, in which the stale smoke smell soon gave place to fresher fumes.

Nettie greeted Mordaunt as if they had met but yesterday. She gave him her finger-tips, signified to him that the cigarette-box was in its old position, and then went on with her conversation with Mr. Saunders.

But Rolly was more enthusiastic ; he left Charlie ; he shook him by both hands.

‘ I am glad to see you, old boy. I am glad to see you,’ he said, two or three times. He was effusive with his hospitality, in calling for drink for him, in standing and talking to him to the disregard of his other friends.

And Mordaunt Rivers stood up against the mantelpiece, talking to Rolly, but thinking that it was eight months since last he stood here, and nothing had altered. The same faces, laughter, red lips and gleaming teeth, jests and gestures. Tom still smoked as quickly as possible in order

to get through as many cigars, while he was smoking for nothing, as time would allow. Ted Smith still played his practical jokes ; now he was elaborately preparing a chair with pins, ready for Charlie, when he should sit down. Lord Lusher was talking ' racing notes ' with Mrs. Montini, already a little muddled and didactic, on the road drunkenwards, as Mordaunt could see. John moved about quickly with glasses, lights, cigarettes, called now here and now there. The room was unchanged in its draperies and broken bric-a-brac ; its photographs of undraped actresses, its pampas grass and bulrushes dropping to pieces in their dirt and decay.

Nothing was changed, save that Nettie, instead of having Antonelli sprawling with his ungainly length beside her on the sofa, sat on the piano stool and talked softly to Ronald Saunders.

Nothing was changed, save that Charlie had been rechristened ' Jack the Ripper ' since he had taken to do the Art criticisms for the paper, and that Lucilla seemed no longer incongruous. The men exchanged chaff with her, the women confidences. Jenny Farrell offered her the use of her powder puff, Lady Lusher handed her her cigarette-case.

As the evening wore on, Mordaunt, still talking to Rolly, noted how the company split up into couples; Nettie and Mr. Saunders talked low; the red lamp on the piano did not shed light enough to show the lines on her face. The young tenor was moved by her: Mordaunt could see how his hands trembled, and the sudden flushes on his beardless cheek, as Nettie played her fish carefully and gently.

Then Mordaunt's eyes, leaving them, as he smiled slightly, talking all the while to Rolly, sought Lucilla. He did not know the rose in her cheeks was not habitual; did not see that she was as one in a dream; and of all those in the room, knew only of his presence.

He knew nothing of this. He saw her, past the portière, standing, one white hand holding the curtain, eyes cast down, and Sandel beside her, talking, talking, talking as the evening wore on.

She let go the curtain, and Mordaunt could see no more. The room he knew so well seemed fetid and close; the low laughter of the women and the murmur of the men's voices jarred on his nerves. He rose abruptly; he was about to say 'Good-night' to Rolly, when the curtains at the end of the room parted, and Lucilla, white,

nervous, came through them to where Mordaunt stood talking to her father.

‘Hullo, Lucy ; where have you been?’

‘In there, with Lord Sandel,’ she replied, with white lips, trembling, and eyes all shocked and wet.

Careless Rolly answered :

‘Well, you’d better go back to him ; I want to talk shop with Mordaunt.’

Lucilla looked at Mordaunt, a look of anguish. What prompted the man, seeing clearly as he did what she was looking for? He could not tell ; but he answered the appeal in her eyes by holding out his hand and saying :

‘Oh, I forgot, Miss Lewesham ; let me take this opportunity of congratulating you on your engagement to Mr. Furley.’

A moment more, and the girl was gone. His heart felt heavy and cold within him ; he talked on, but scarce knew of what.

‘You look seedy, old man ; have a glass of “Scotch ” neat? It will pull you together.’

Whether he looked seedy or not, he must have turned pale, or Rolly would have noticed nothing. He took the proffered drink and others, presently. Minutes passed ; half-an-hour passed ; an hour passed.

‘Good-night, Rolly,’ he said abruptly; ‘I must be off.’

‘Good-night, then, if you must go. Now you’ve broken the ice, come often.’

Mordaunt did not disturb the party by formal adieux. Rolly went out into the hall with him; Sandel was there, talking to John. He made a pretence of looking for his coat and hat, but Mordaunt’s eyes, sharpened by remorse, saw a meaning in his every gesture—in the something he slipped into John’s hand, in the glance of intelligence he thought he saw pass between them.

Mordaunt went out into the streets after Sandel had departed; the door closed behind him, he went a few steps, then paused irresolute and returned. High up in the attic room that was Lucilla’s, he saw a light, dim white, behind the blind. Maidenly pure looked the dim light behind the blind.

Lucilla, poor frightened child, how she had come over to him for protection, and to her father! His heart melted—his, who thought his love for her had died in the hour he heard she was going to marry the performer.

He went back into the house; the hall was empty, save of John, who let him in.

‘John,’ he said quickly, in a manner unlike

Mordaunt's, 'I want five minutes with Miss Lucy ; go up and tell her so. I'll wait in the library. Tell her I want to speak to her. Mind you tell her I am waiting.'

Wooden-faced John answers :

'Miss Lucy has gone out ; she went out ten minutes afore you did.'

Mordaunt's teeth went right through his underlip, and he never felt the hurt. He went out of the house.

Too late, too late ! He thought Sandel had asked her and she had gone. She had come to him first, had looked at him : he felt it now, for some sign or token that his love for her or his care for her was not all dead or vanished. Had looked to him, and he had failed her.

Russell Square was empty, deserted and chill, the moon on the pavement might have been snow, it was so white and cold. She had gone to Lord Sandel—she, his little Lucy, who had fled from him ere her womanhood had had time to bud in his arms ; whom he could yet have held, although nothing had been explained and nothing said, but now—now it was too late.

There surged over this man a very passion of regret ; he cursed himself for his forbearance, his

consideration in time past. His heart was hot and sick within him, as it had been before, and it was as if Time's finger had not passed over the raw place whence she had been torn away; his Lucilla, with the child's face and the eyes that twice to-night had pleaded with him, once for love, once again, with fear and agony, for help and succour.

Those eyes of hers burned themselves into his, and seemed with him wherever he turned. He walked along with them before him; they pleaded with him all the way. He could not rid himself of them in the quiet streets, nor in the noisy club, into which he turned for a moment to escape their appeal.

He stood for a few moments at the bar of the 'Ooferies'—the click of the billiard-balls, the inflamed faces of the betting men and sporting men, and of the famous comedian, holding forth there with the expurgated portions of one of his songs, could not shut out the gaze that haunted him.

Again he felt the life he led and they all led was foul beyond words. To have known her in one of those Bayswater drawing-rooms, whose dull respectability he had spent his journalistic life in deriding, would have been happiness to him.

And so thinking he reached his home in Cecil

Street, turned the key in the latch, walked up the narrow dingy stairs, put his hand to the door, and received his first faint shock on seeing there was a light in the room ; then he turned the handle, and paused on the threshold.

Yes, his eyes had not played him false, though he put his hand up to them, as if to shade them from too bright a light.

She stood there very white, nothing of the child left about her.

‘ I have come back,’ she said, with the ghost of a laugh, that turned bitter in her mouth.

‘ Lucilla ! Lucilla !’

Never was a lover more pitiful kind than he in soothing the agony of self-abasement that sobbed itself out in his arms.

‘ Forgive me, forgive me !’

‘ My darling, after this I can have nothing to forgive. May God forgive me if ever I let you regret it !’

‘ Did you want me ? do you love me ?’ she asked feverishly.

And his answer satisfied even her.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HE was her lover, not her judge. Who shall be her judge? Had she ever a chance of leading a cleanly or an honourable life? Was instinct untrained by education sufficient to keep her pure in such surroundings?

The fire of love in her heart had smouldered to ashes under the cold wind of separation. They burst into flames when she saw him; and the kiss Lord Sandel had wrested from her in that inner room had driven her into her lover's arms.

It was a terrible thing she did.

The streets, empty and cold, smote her from her purpose that grew more terrible as it grew nearer. The servant who showed her to his room cut her to the soul when she looked at her with coarse laughter that dwelt in the silence when she had gone. And then the waiting with sinking fear, and hopes more sickening than fear, so full of shame they were; when her cheeks flushed hot

and her loud heart-beats shut out the footsteps she listened for.

In agony she would hide her face in her hands, moan and sob ; she would crouch down in the corner of the sofa and wish the earth would cover her. Minutes seemed hours until he came, then she would have put time back for ever, so that it might not look upon her shameful face.

‘ I have come back,’ was all she could say with pitiful down-drawn mouth, and eyes that could not look at him.

He clasped her like a lover, spoke words to her that she drank in as one who dies of thirst, drove fear and shame away with kisses ; with protecting arms held close around her, with whispers that thrilled her, and made her put her head upon his breast, and love him with a love that brought her peace.

Then she knew happiness. He took two rooms for them at Twickenham ; the woman who kept Lucilla from wifehood kept him poor, but he did the best he could. This was the first home Lucilla had ever known. Mordaunt would sit and write, and she would watch him ; she never liked to be far off him. She would sit in a chair so close beside him that she could touch his coat-sleeve

now and then to assure herself that she was not dreaming, but awake and with him, never more to be parted. When they walked out she would hold his arm, keep close to his side. Her eyes never seemed to leave his face ; she could not bear that he should be out of her sight for a moment.

They led a life isolated from the world, living solely for and in each other. Mordaunt would write in the mornings, Lucilla beside him ; in the afternoons, hand in hand like two children, they would wander about the country, or, strolling down to the river, would idly float to Richmond, all the green around them framing peace and happy love. So long as she could touch him, hold his hand, know he was near, Lucilla was happy. She neither read, wrote, worked nor thought ; her entire being was absorbed by him.

This lasted a month.

Then he had to go to London on business, for the day only. She wept and clung to him, and entreated him not to go. He took her into his arms.

‘ Be reasonable, my darling ! I must go. We must live ; and if I don’t work we can’t live. I shall only be gone a few hours. Come down to the station to meet me ; that will shorten the

time. Sweetheart, don't cry so ! You break my heart. Another kiss. No, not that way ; raise your head, so that I can see you are not crying any more. Give me your lips.'

He left the kisses on her lips to keep her company in his absence. She had no occupation ; no woman's work had she ever learned to keep fingers busy or thoughts clean. She sat idle, her thoughts not swerving an instant from him, filled full with his last kiss, his presence, his personality ; murmuring his name, slipping down from her seat to rest her head against the place where his dear feet had trod.

That was how Sinclair Furley found her. He had taken a great deal of trouble to trace her, for Rolly gave him no information—said he had none to give. And in a measure that was true ; for Mordaunt supplied his copy, came to the office, and did his work. Rolly asked no questions, and Mordaunt volunteered no information ; but the men seemed drawn more closely together in an invisible bond of sympathy.

Sinclair Furley found out where she was—no matter how—and now he stood before her in the room made sacred to her by her lover.

She saw him, shuddered, hid her face.

'Go away ! go away !'

‘ Oh no, no ! You don’t mean it.’

‘ Go away !’

She was feeble, but his very presence was hateful to her. He poisoned the atmosphere to her, stood between her and what was light to her ; for she could not see Mordaunt while Sinclair Furley stood there in his place.

‘ I shall not go away. You are engaged to me ; I have never released you. You have promised to marry me. This’—he waved his hand deprecatingly—‘ is merely an episode, an experience, interesting, but—but it has been done before. I am no purist, but it is “banale,” utterly “banale.”’

She knelt with face averted from him, praying, praying that he would go away ; for she dreaded each word he might utter. She had thought no more of sin or shame since she had been with Mordaunt, but only of love ; now, every word seemed as a blow that fell effacing love, leaving only sin. The very air seemed soiled as he talked on, and would not go.

‘ I will come every day while he is away. You know, now you have begun this kind of life, that that sort of thing is quite usual. Ha, ha, ha ! What would he say to see me here ? But we must be very careful. Do not be shy with me,’

he said ; and with that put his hand on her shoulder, and would have caressed her.

She sprang to her feet, with white face and wild eyes.

‘How dare you?—how dare you?’ she gasped out, choked with disgust and fear.

His face—that sallow, unhealthy face of his—seemed very near, shutting out Mordaunt, encompassing her and stifling her, until she could hardly breathe for it.

‘Oh now ; really now,’ he began, ‘you allow Mordaunt to——’

And again he would have grasped her hand. She flung it away, and raised both arms to Heaven, which saw the tragedy ; and then she shrieked and fell. Sinclair heard the shriek—it rang in his ears for months—saw the figure lying white, silent and still, with a little foam in the corners of the mouth and the features drawn and distorted ; then turned and left her for ever.

Poor Lucilla ! She awoke from this attack before Mordaunt returned, was able to find her way into her room, gaze into her looking-glass, recognise, and remember ! Then she saw her doom before her, a doom so terrible that a stouter heart than hers might have quailed before it.

She remembered the blood-shot eyes and bitten lips of that demon Epilepsy, whose every trace she recognised with awful distinctness. *And she knew this was not its first attempt upon her.* Memory took her back to that night when Nettie had turned her from the house, to that illness that had come upon her in the Refuge.

She looked in the glass. Blood-shot eyes staring wildly and bitten lips, with the dried blood on them. Ah! she had reason still, and her heart was still human, and she looked upon herself and dreaded the growth from Lucilla into Marius—the dreadful, dreadful growth!

Now she knew, looking at herself with those wild eyes that gave her back her look, that Marius had always been with her. He was her twin soul; he had suffered and died. Everyone had looked upon him with horror. O God! O God! would Mordaunt so look upon her?

She shut out her eyes with her hands, and saw her lover, Mordaunt, in whose love she lived, shrinking back from her with horror, dreading as she had dreaded those shrieks, her wild grimaces, her hopeless, helpless, dreadful self.

Then her brain grew mad with the pain of it, as she writhed and groaned and saw the doom

roll up and over her, and her barque of Reason go down under it ; and the terror and the torture burned her eyeballs, and set her brain on fire.

With eyes that could not see and head that could not feel for pain, she snatched the razor from the table. And the edge was keen—she could feel with her fingers. And the sob that arose in her throat must be let out. And then the image of Marius, whom she had become, mingled itself with the image of Sinclair, who said she belonged to him. And she belonged to both of them, Marius and Sinclair, Sinclair and Marius—changing loathsome figures, encompassing her and stifling her.

Oh ! that is Marius, his cold hands about her throat. No, that is Sinclair ; weak, he cannot hold her. No, no ! it is Mordaunt, who sees her changing. ‘No, no !’ she shrieks, ‘he shall not see her so.’ Be stronger, Sinclair ; be stronger, Marius. Throttle her, strangle her ! Don’t let him see—don’t let him see her with them both over her and about her.

She is on the floor, with swollen head and veins congested ; her right hand holds the razor open, but she cannot use it ; for the demon has seized her again, is stiffening her and throttling her, as

she writhes and shrieks, and Mordaunt is almost at the door.

A moment more, and he would be here ; a moment more, and he would see her thus. But reason is not quite obscured. One effort, one—O God, help her now ! And then the bright red blood gushes forth on the floor, and gushes, and gushes, from red to black, until Mordaunt comes.

For all that others sinned, Lucilla suffered. But the last suffering of all she was spared. She never saw the love-light die out of his eyes or his bonds gall him. She was not strong enough to live and suffer ; she was strong enough to do and die.

The one flower that bloomed and faded in this foul soil, died out seedless. But the soil remains. And it will bear bitter fruit. Who will purify the soil ?

THE END.

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